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Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

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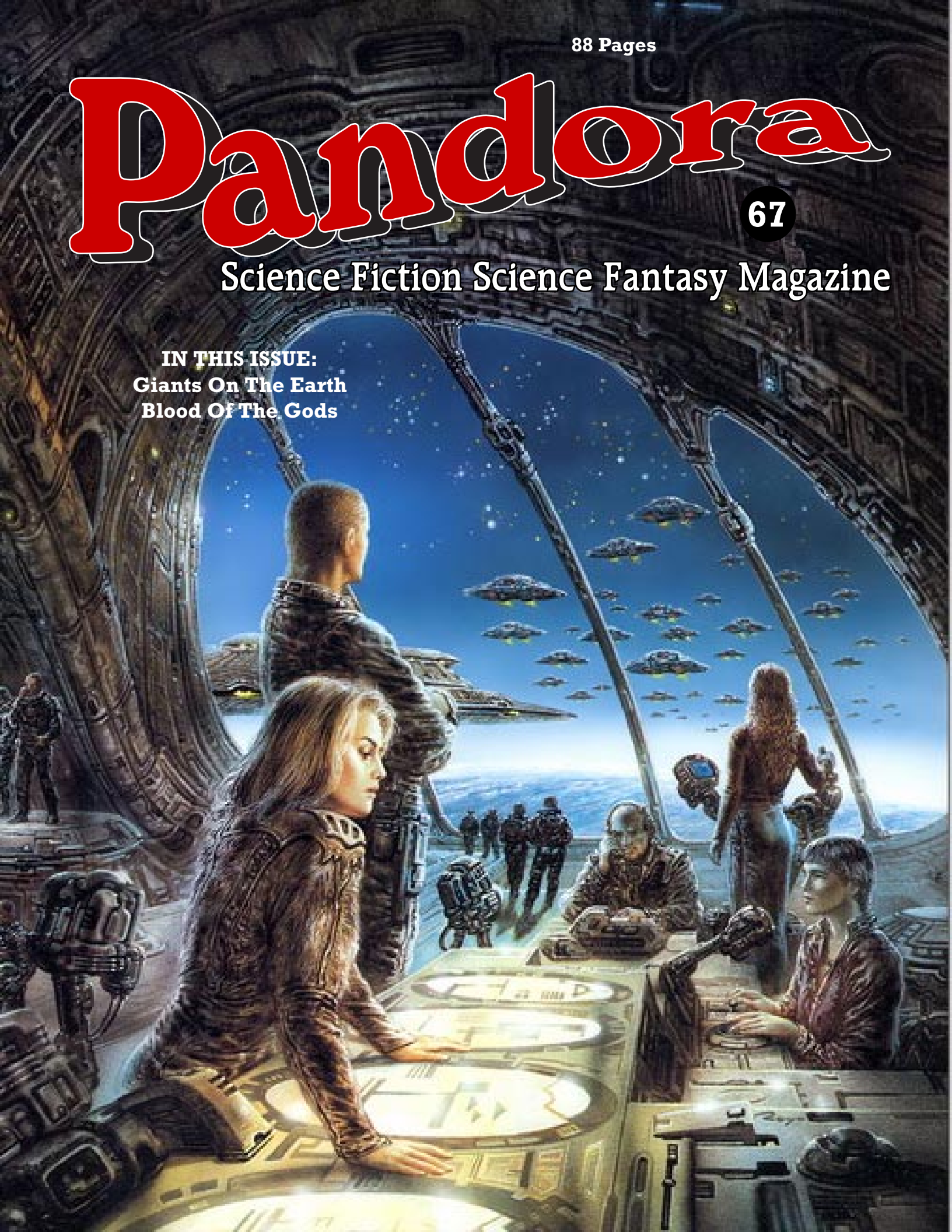
Blood Of The Gods



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Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

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GIANTS ON THE EARTH

The yoke of Jovian oppression rests heavily on the dwellers of Earth—until Damis, the Nepthalim, comes forward to lead them in spirited revolt.

CHAPTER I

The Jovian Tyrant

Glavour, Jovian Viceroy of the Earth, looked arrogantly about as he lay at ease on the cushions of the ornate chariot which bore him through the streets of his capital city. Like all the Jovians, he was cast in a heroic mold compared to his Earth-born subjects. Even for a Jovian, Glavour was large. He measured a good eight feet from the soles of his huge splayed feet to the crown of his enormous head, crested with stiff black hair which even the best efforts of Tonsome, the court barber, failed to make lie in order. His keen black eyes glittered as they swept over the scene before him. Where only a few years before had been only tangled tropical jungle on the narrow neck of land separating the two great oceans, now rose row after row of stately buildings. Suddenly Glavour's attention was attracted by a girlish form in a passing chariot.

"Stop!" he cried.

Obedient to the driver's touch on a lever, the tiny radium motor of the chariot ceased to revolve and the equipage stopped its forward motion. Glavour turned to an equerry at his side.

"Havenner," he exclaimed, "did you note that maiden who passed us?"

"I did, Your Excellency."

"Bring her before me."

The equerry sprang lightly to the ground and called out in a stentorian voice. At the sound every vehicle on the street ceased its movement until the will of the Viceroy, the ruler of the Sons of God, should be made known. In a few steps, his powerful Jovian muscles carrying his huge body forward at a rate impossible to persons born of Earthly parentage who had not inherited the power needed to overcome the enormous gravity of Jupiter, Havenner reached the equipage containing the girl. He gave a curt order and the girl's driver turned his vehicle and brought it alongside the Viceroy's.

* * * * *

Glavour's eyes rested on the slim lithesome figure of the Earth-girl. She was just emerging from the grace of girlhood into the full dignity of young womanhood and the soft clinging garb she wore accentuated rather than concealed the curves of her body. As Glavour's gaze fell on her, she cast down her eyes and a flush crept slowly over her pretty face to the mass of coppery gold hair which crowned her head. An expression of brutal lust came into the Viceroy's eyes.

"Daughter of Man," he said slowly, "how are you named and what is your family?"

"My name is Lura, Your Excellency," she faltered, "and I am the daughter of Turgan, the Kildare of this province."

"You please me, girl," said the Viceroy. "Dismiss your chariot and join me in mine. There is room in my seraglio for you."

Lura stared with horror at the huge Jovian and shrank back from his sensual gaze. Glavour gazed at her in astonishment and a deep scowl spread over his face.

"The prospect does not seem to please you, Daughter of Man," he said slowly. "Perhaps the company of the Viceroy of Tubain, Ruler of the Universe, is too lowly to please you and you desire more exalted company. Be careful that I do not have you stripped and given to the palace guards for their sport. Join me in my chariot."

He half rose and leaned forward to clasp her. Lura gave a cry of horror and sprang from her chariot to the ground on the side farthest from the vehicle of the Viceroy. Glavour leaped to his feet with a roar of rage and lunged after her. Before he had left his chariot, the hand of his equerry fell restrainingly on his shoulder. The Viceroy turned a rage-maddened face toward his minion.

"Seize that maiden, Havenner!" he cried. "As I live, she shall be sacrificed at the next games."

The equerry made no move to obey his superior's orders and Glavour's face grew purple with rage.

"Obey my orders or you shall join her as a sacrifice!" he roared.

The equerry's face paled slightly and grew grim at the Viceroy's words but no trace of fear appeared on his heavy countenance.

"Save your breath, Glavour," he said shortly, but in so quiet a voice that

no one but the Viceroy heard him. "You may be head of the Sons of God on this planet but your power does not extend to life and death over me, who am of the same blood that you are. I have the right to appeal to Tubain from such a sentence. Before you strive to haul that girl away to your already crowded seraglio against her will, listen to me. Do you realize who she is?"

The Viceroy's face was a study. For a moment rage predominated and he raised a mighty fist to strike Havenner down, but the equerry looked him fearlessly in the eye. Slowly the hot rage faded and a deadly ferocity took its place.

"You try me far, Havenner," he said in a quiet voice, yet with a hint of steel in his tones, "yet your loyalty is above suspicion. Heard you not the girl say she was the daughter of the Kildare of this province?"

"I heard, Your Excellency," replied the equerry, "but beyond that, she is someone else. She is the affianced bride of Damis, the son of Hortan, who was Viceroy before you."

"A Nepthalim!" exclaimed the Viceroy scornfully. "What matters that? Are the desires of a half-breed bastard to stand above the wishes of the ruler of the planet?"

"It is true that the mother of Damis was a Daughter of Man," said the equerry quietly, "yet Hortan married her in honor. Damis is a man of great influence and it would be well to reflect before you rob him of his chosen bride. There is wide discontent with our rule which needs only a leader to flare up. Remember that we are few and Jupiter is far away."

"Havenner, you talk like a frightened woman," sneered the Viceroy. "Let him join the ranks of the malcontents. For my part, I hope they revolt. They need to be taught a lesson. Stand aside while I seize the maiden."

The equerry stood aside with a shrug of his shoulders and the Viceroy sprang to the ground. The girl had run as rapidly as her clinging robes would allow toward one of the beautiful buildings which lined the thoroughfare. She had almost reached the doorway before Glavour reached the ground and raced after her. His Jovian muscles carried his body forward at a pace which no Terrestrial could equal. It was evident to the watchers that he would seize Lura before she could reach the sanctuary she sought.

A mingled chorus of cries of rage and hisses came from the Earthmen who witnessed the scene. The Jovian guards strove to suppress the outcries until a word from Havenner made them cease their efforts and close in around the Viceregal chariot. The cries rose to a tumult but as yet none of the Earthmen dared to raise a hand against the person of the representative of Tubain, the far-off Jovian whom they had been forced to acknowledge as God, and whom many of the ignorant believed was God.

The Viceroy rapidly overtook his victim and his hand was outstretched to grasp her when there came an interrup-

tion. From the doorway which the girl had been striving to reach, a man burst forth and leaped between her and her pursuer. Glavour stopped and glowered at the new obstacle in the path of his sensuality.

The newcomer stood five inches over six feet in his flat sandals but it was only in his unusual height and his enormous strength that he showed the blood of his Jovian father. His feet were small and shapely with a high-arched instep and his whole form was graceful and symmetrical. Crisply curling yellow hair surmounted a head which Praxiteles would have reveled in as a model for his youthful Hermes. As he faced the Viceroy, his usual pleasant smile was gone and his face was set in grim lines, his clear blue eyes as cold as the ice brought from the polar regions to cool the Viceroy's drink.

* * * * *

The two stood and stared at one another, the black eyes of the Jovian burning like fire in strange contrast to the cold glare of the blue ones. Then tension in the street grew taut. The Earthmen gradually closed in about them. At a word from Havenner, the Jovian guards closed up and drew from their garments long black tubes. Presently Glavour broke the silence.

"Make way, son of Hortan, for the Viceroy of God," he rumbled in his deep-toned voice.

Damis made no reply, nor did he move a muscle. The rage deepened on the Viceroy's face and he strode forward, his hand raised to strike down this puny assailant who had interposed his slight form between the massive limbs of the Jovian and the object of his desires. With a cry of rage he brought down his huge hand and then Damis moved. So swiftly that the eye could hardly follow his movements, he leaped to one side and his own hand shot up. Fingers of steel circled the hairy wrist of the Viceroy and stopped his hand in mid-air. For a moment Glavour was too astonished at the idea of physical resistance to move. Damis, with an almost contemptuous air, tossed aside the hand he held and made as if to turn his back. With an inarticulate roar of rage, the Jovian charged.

Again Damis sprang to one side and his hand moved. In a long arc his clenched fist shot up and caught Glavour on the chin and rocked the four hundred pounds of bone and muscle that made up the Viceroy. For a moment Glavour staggered and then his hand fell on Damis' shoulder. Exerting all of his huge strength, he pulled his opponent toward him and threw his massive arms about him. Damis made no attempt to wriggle out of the bone-crushing grip, but, instead, threw his arms about the Jovian and matched muscle against muscle. The Jovian guards, who had witnessed the feats of strength which were the Viceroy's boast, expected only one outcome, but to Havenner, who recalled that Hortan, the father of Damis, had been one of the mightiest men of Jupiter, the issue was not a foregone conclusion. Stealthily as a cat he crept forward, a long black tube clenched in his hand.

Mightily the two strove. The face of the Jovian grew dark red and then almost purple as he put forth his last ounce of strength to crush the opponent whom he topped a good eighteen inches. For all of his effort, not an inch did Damis yield. His face grew as pale as the Jovian's grew red and his breath came whistling through his lips, but the strength he had inherited from his mighty sire stood him in good stead. Inch by inch he bent the huge form of his opponent backward. With a sudden effort, the Jovian raised one of his huge misshapen feet and strove to bring his mighty thighs to aid him in thrusting away his enemy. Damis' knee came up and the Jovian dropped his foot with a howl of pain. His breath came in gasps and he stared into the implacable blue eyes before him with a sudden spasm of fear. At last Glavour had met his match.

He opened his lips to call to his guards for help but shame held back the cry. Once he admitted defeat, the fear in which the Earthmen held him would be shaken. With an effort he bent forward his head and buried his huge fangs in Damis' shoulder. There was a cry from the watching Earthmen as they surged forward. The Jovian guards ran to their ruler's assistance but they were too far away. Havenner was close and he sprang forward, thrusting the black tube which he carried, toward Damis.

A cry advised Damis of his danger. With a herculean effort he lifted the huge Jovian from his feet and swung him around until the massive body was between him and the threatening weapon of the equerry. As swiftly as striking snakes his arms uncoiled from around Glavour's body and grasped him by the shoulders. With one mighty heave he tore the Jovian's mouth from his shoulder although the flesh was torn and lacerated by the action. One arm went under Glavour's arm and back around until the hand rested on the back of his neck. The other arm caught the Viceroy's arm and twisted it behind his back. Glavour gave a cry of pain as the punishing hold was applied. Holding his captive before him, Damis turned to the equerry.

"Put up your tube," he said. "One hostile move and your ruler dies." "Disintegrate him, Havenner!" gasped the Viceroy. * * * * *

The equerry hesitated a moment but aid was at hand. The Jovian guards had come up to the scene of the struggle and surrounded the pair, black tubes in their hands. The sight of reinforcements roused the Viceroy's lagging courage.

"Capture him alive!" he gasped. "He will be sacrificed at the next games!"

With a roar the guards closed in on the struggling pair. As hairy hands grasped his shoulders, Damis lunged back with all his strength. There was the crack of a breaking bone and the Viceroy's arm hung dangling and useless. Damis whirled on the guards, shaking himself loose for a moment from their grasp, and his fists flew out. Two of the giants went down before well-aimed blows but no one man, no matter what his might, could fight against a

score of the huge Jovians and Damis was borne to the ground. Even as he fell, a roar went up from the watching Terrestrials and with one accord they closed in to attack.

The Jovian guards who were nearest whirled about and raised the black tubes threateningly. For a moment the Earthmen hesitated and then came on with a rush. From the tubes came rays of intensely violet light. As they fell on the front ranks of the charging Terrestrials, the form, on which the rays impinged grew suddenly tenuous. The sunlight penetrated through the bodies for a moment and then there was nothing but a group of dancing motes of light to mark where they had stood.

Undaunted by the fate of their leaders, the balance of the mob surged forward uttering cries of hate and rage. From all the doorways, fresh hordes of Earthmen came rushing to join the fray. Again and again the terrible rays of the Jovian guards blasted scores of their assailants into nothingness but more came. Presently the tubes of the Jovians began to lose their power and the violet light became lighter in shade. With a roar the Earthmen swept forward and the huge guards went down under the onrushing waves of humanity. Half a dozen of them were dragged down and hurled back into the milling crowd where they were torn limb from limb. The balance of the guards, guided by Havenner's stentorian shouts, closed in around Glavour and the prisoner and battered their way by sheer brute force toward the Viceregal chariot. They had reached in and climbed in when a feminine shout pierced the din of conflict.

"Damis! They have Damis prisoner! Rescue him!"

With a roar, the mob charged again. Mightily the Jovians strove but they were outnumbered by hundreds to one. One after another was torn from the chariot until Damis freed himself by a mighty effort and leaped to the ground. As he did so, the driver's hand found the controlling lever and the chariot shot forward, crushing under its wheels several luckless Earthmen who stood in its path. A roar of triumph rose from the crowd and Damis was hastily lifted to their shoulders. He looked down on his rescuers with an anguished face.

"Lura!" he gasped. "Is she safe?"

One of the Terrestrials shouted something unintelligible and pointed up. Damis' gaze followed the direction in which he pointed. From an upper window of the building into which she had fled, Lura's face, wreathed with smiles, looked down on him. He smiled and waved in triumph to her. There was a stir on the outskirts of the crowd and an elderly man, tall for an Earthman and with dignity and authority written large on his countenance, made his way through the crowd. At a word from him, Damis was lowered to his feet to face the newcomer.

"Damis," said the elderly man, "I never thought to grasp the hand of a Nepthalim or of anyone with Jovian blood in his veins in friendship, yet I can do no less than offer my hand. It is the thanks of a father to the saviour of his daughter."

Damis met the outstretched hand with a grip that made the elderly man wince.

"It is an honor and a pleasure to grasp in friendship the hand of Turgan, the Kildare of this province," he said, "the hand of one who was born to be ruler in fact, instead of an underling under a Jovian master."

"It is true that my father was king of this country before the Jovians came, forty years ago," said Turgan gravely, "yet now there is no honor or merit in it. Even the rank of Kildare, which is but that of a slave ruling other more unfortunate slaves, could not have prevented my only daughter from being dragged away to the seraglio of that monster. To such a pass has one been brought whose birth made him the peer of any. But now we must plan and plan swiftly, else are we undone. Glavour will return with his minions. Safety will be found only in flight, for mere numbers cannot oppose the weapons they will turn against us. Damis, so far you have been one with our Jovian masters, as have all of the Nepthalim. Now it is war to the death between them and us. On which side do you stand?"

Damis hesitated as the Kildare's keen gray eyes bored into his own.

"My father was Viceroy of the Earth in the days gone by," he said slowly, "and he planned that I should take his place. His dream was a peaceful union of the strength and science of Jupiter with the beauty and humanity of the Earth. True to his dream, I have cleaved to his people and striven to bring it about, but I can see now the folly of his ambition. In stature and mental power he was a Jovian, in all else he was a Terrestrial. Since his death I have seen you stripped bit by bit of what he left you until now you are lower than the slaves on Jupiter, who can appeal to Tubain against a cruel master. Even I, a Nepthalim, the son of a Viceroy, am forced to revolt to save the maiden I love. Henceforth, I give up my father's dream of peace and do what my heart tells me is right. It is war to the death between the Sons of God and the Sons of Man, and I, who am descended from a Son of God and a Daughter of Man, cleave to my mother's people."

A shout of joy came from all who heard his ringing voice announce his new allegiance. Damis had ever a reputation as a humane man and he was guilty of none of the brutalities which made the Jovians so detested and which were bettered by those of the Nepthalim who had the power. It was only the influence which Damis had wielded with the Earthmen which had prevented many an outbreak which would have been ruthlessly crushed by the Jovian overlords. To know that the son of a Viceroy, reputed one of the most brilliant as well as one of the strongest of Jovian blood, was one with them, made them hope that they might make some headway against their oppressors and wring from them some small measure of liberty. Turgan's face was wreathed with smiles.

"Again I offer you my hand, Damis," he said. "Before it was as a father thanking you for the rescue of his daughter.

Now it is a father welcoming the son he has always longed for and whom he feared he would never have. My consent to your union with Lura which was grudgingly given only to save her from the dishonor of being dragged a slave to Glavour's seraglio, is withdrawn, and in its place I give you a happy father's joyous consent to the marriage."

There were tears in the old Kildare's eyes as he grasped the hand of the young blond giant. For a moment they stood with clasped hands, two strong men taking the measure of one another and each found the other good. The Kildare dropped Damis' hand and turned to the crowd.

"To your homes!" he cried sharply. "The Sons of God will return with new weapons and it is my wish that none be found to oppose them. All within sound of my voice who are members of the inner council will join me in the palace. Damis, come with me."

Followed by Damis and a score of Earthmen, the Kildare led the way into a building. As they entered, Damis cast a swift glance around and looked questioningly at Turgan.

"Lura—?" he asked hesitantly.

"Will join us in the council room," said Turgan with a smile.

CHAPTER II

Turgan's Plan

Content with the Kildare's answer, Damis followed him down a corridor and into a large room set around with benches. The Kildare did not pause but moved to the far end of the room and manipulated a hidden switch. A portion of the paneled wall swung inward and through the doorway thus opened, Turgan led the way. The corridor in which they found themselves was dimly lighted by radium bulbs which Damis shrewdly suspected had been stolen from the palace of the Viceroy by Earthmen employed there. It sloped steeply downward and Damis estimated that they were fifty feet below the level of the ground before another door opened to Turgan's manipulation of hidden catches and admitted them to a large room equipped with tables and chairs and well lighted by other radium bulbs. Damis turned to the Kildare.

"For years there have been rumors among the Sons of God of the existence of this place," he exclaimed, "yet every effort to find it has been futile. Glavour and his council have at last decided that it is merely a myth and that the underground council chamber does not exist. You have kept your secret well, for never has a breath of suspicion reached him that Turgan was one of the conspirators who plotted to overthrow the reign of the Sons of God."

"Let that, Damis, be a sample of the earnestness and loyalty of your new brethren," said the Kildare. "There are hundreds of Earthmen who know where this place is and what secrets it holds, yet none has ever betrayed it. Scores have gone to torture and to the sacrifice of the games without unsealing their lips. Would a Jovian have done likewise?"

"To give them due credit, I think they would have," replied Damis thoughtfully, "yet their motive would not

have been loyalty, but stubbornness and a refusal to subordinate their will to another's. I thought you said that Lura would join us here?"

* * * * *

As Damis spoke a door on the far side of the chamber opened and a half dozen women entered. Lura was among them and with a cry of joy, she ran lightly forward and threw herself into Damis' outstretched arms. Turgan smiled paternally at them for a moment and then touched his daughter lightly on the shoulder.

"I have freely and gladly given my blessing to your union with Damis," he said. "He is now one with us. His presence makes victory possible and enables us to act at once instead of planning for years. Damis, you can operate a space flyer, can you not?"

"Certainly. That is knowledge which all Nepthalim possess."

A suppressed cheer greeted his words and the Earthmen crowded around him, vibrant with excitement.

"The time is at hand!" cried a stern-faced man in the crimson robe which marked him an Akildare, an under-officer of the Earthmen.

"Before I can operate a space flyer, I will have to have one to operate," objected Damis.

"That will be supplied," cried a dozen voices. Turgan's voice rose above the hubbub of sound.

"Let us proceed in orderly fashion," he cried.

The noise died down to silence and at a gesture from their ruler, the Earthmen took seats. Turgan stood beside Damis.

"For the enlightenment of our new-found brother, I will recite what has happened and what we have done, although most of you know it and many of you have done your part in bringing it about.

"Forty years ago, the Earth was prosperous, peopled with free men, and happy. While we knew little of science and lived in mere huts, yet we worshipped beauty and Him who ruled all and loved his children. It was to such a world that the Jovians came.

"When the first space flyer with a load of these inhuman monsters arrived on the earth, we foolishly took them for the angels whom we had been taught to believe spent eternity in glorifying Him. We welcomed them with our best and humbly obeyed when they spoke. This illusion was fostered by the name the Jovians gave themselves, the 'Sons of God.' Hortan, their leader and the father of our new brother, was a just and kindly man and he ruled the earth wisely and well. We learned from them and they learned from us. That was the golden age. And the Sons of God saw that the Daughters of Man were fair, and they took of them wives, such as they chose. And sons were born to them, the Nepthalim, the mighty men of the Earth.

"In time other flyers came from the heavens above and brought more of the Sons of God to rule over us. Then Hortan, the Viceroy, died, and Damis, know you how he died? You were a babe at the time and you know nothing. Your father and your mother, who was my distant

kinswoman, died under the knives of assassins. It was given out that they had gone to Jupiter, yet there were some who knew the truth. You, the killers sought, but one of the Earthmen whose heart bled for your dead mother, spirited you away. When you had grown to boyhood, he announced your name and lineage, although his life paid for his indiscretion. The same hand which struck down your father and your mother struck at him and struck not unavailingly. You, since all knew your name and lineage, he dared not strike, lest those who love him not, would appeal to Tubain. Know you the name of the monster, the traitor to his ruler and the murderer of your parents?"

Damis' face had paled during the recital and when the old Kildare turned to him, he silently shook his head.

"It was the monster who now rules over us as Viceroy and who profanes the name of God by conferring it on his master and who would, if he dared, assume the name for himself. It was Glavour, Viceroy of the Earth."

The blood surged back into Damis' face and he raised a hand in a dramatic gesture.

"Now I vow that I will never rest until he lies low in death and this be the hand that brings him there!"

A murmur of applause greeted Damis' announcement and Turgan went on with his tale.

"With the kind and just Hortan dead, Glavour assumed the throne of power, for none dared oppose him. Once secure, he gave way to every brutal lust and vice. Your mother was Hortan's only wife and he honored her as such, and meant that the Nepthalim should in time rule the Earth, but Glavour had no such ideas. To him, the Daughters of Man were playthings to satisfy his brutal lusts. By dozens and by scores he swept the fairest of them into his seraglio, heeding not the bonds of matrimony nor the wishes of his victims. Only the fact that my daughter has been kept from his sight until to-day has spared her.

"The Earthmen who had been content to live under Hortan's rule, rebelled against Glavour but the rebellion was crushed in blood. Time and again they rose, but each time the mighty weapons of the Jovians stamped out resistance. At last we realized that craft and not force must win the battle. This chamber had been built when Hortan erected his new capital and none of the Jovians knew of its location, so it was chosen as our meeting place. To-day, Damis, I have twenty thousand men sworn to do my bidding and to rise when I give the word. Many thousands more will rise when they see others in arms and know that again the Sons of Man stand in arms against the Sons of God."

"There are less than a thousand Jovians and perhaps twice that number of Nepthalim on the Earth, yet that handful would stand victorious against all the Earthmen living," said Damis thoughtfully. "Even I, and I am a Nepthalim, do not know the secret weapons in the arsenal of Glavour, but I know that they are more powerful than anything we have ever seen. Forget not, too, that a radio message to Jupiter will bring

down ships with hundreds, nay, thousands, of her fighting men with weapons to overwhelm all opposition."

"Such was the case but it is so no longer since we number you among us," replied the Kildare. "Earthmen are employed in the communications net which the Jovians have thrown around the Earth and it is but a step from those machines to the huge one with which they talk to their mother planet. My spies have been busy for years and our plans are all laid. There is one planet which all the forces of Jupiter have never been able to conquer; from which their ships have ever retreated in defeat."

"Mars!" exclaimed Damis.

"Exactly," replied Turgan. "The Martians are a peaceful and justice-loving people, yet they know that peace is given only to those who are ready and able to fight for it. Ages ago they perfected weapons before which the Jovians fly, if they are not destroyed. I have communicated with the Grand Mognac of Mars and laid our plight before him. He has pledged his aid and has promised us enough of his weapons to not only destroy the Jovians and the Nepthalim on the Earth, but also to prevent other Jovian ships from ever landing. The only problem has been how to get them here. The Martians, not desiring conquest and content with their own planet, have never perfected space flyers. They have promised us the weapons, but we must go to Mars and bring them here. Enough can be transported on one of the Jovian ships."

"How will we get a ship?" asked Damis.

"That also has been solved. There are two Jovian ships kept on the Earth, ready for instant flight to Jupiter. They are loosely guarded for the Sons of God believe that we have no idea of how to operate them. We can capture one of them whenever we desire, but so far such action would have been useless. Little by little we have gathered bits of information about the flyers, but we had expected to wait for years before our venture would have a chance of success. We dared not try prematurely, for one attempt will be all that we will ever get. Now we are ready to strike. You can fly the ship to Mars and back and with the Martian weapons, we can sweep the Jovians from the Earth."

Damis' eyes lighted as Turgan spoke.

"Your plans are good," he cried, "and I will fly the ship for you. In return I ask but one thing: let mine be the hand which strikes Glavour down."

"If it can be so done, yours shall be the hand, oh Nepthalim!" cried the Akildare who had first spoken of the ship. Turgan bowed his head and a murmur of assent came from the assembled council.

"And now for action!" cried Turgan. "There is no need to talk longer. Years ago our plans were perfected for the capture of the space ship and each knows the part assigned to him. Toness, the Akildare, will rule during my absence, for I will command the ship, under Damis. Twelve of our men who know all that we have been able to learn will

make up the crew. None of them will take any part in the capture of the ship for many lives may be lost in that venture and we will need the instructed men to operate the ship after we capture it. Damis, have you any addition to make to our plans?"

"Only one, Turgan. Glavour will ransack the Earth rather than be cheated of one he has marked for his prey. Lura will be safe nowhere on Earth. Her capture by the Sons of God will discourage the timid who will say that if Turgan cannot protect his own daughter, how can he free the Earth? She must go with us."

"Your point is well taken, Damis," replied the Kildare. "She shall go. Now to action! Monaill, are your men ready?"

"They will assemble at my signal, oh, Kildare."

"Give the signal, for nothing will be gained by delay. We will follow behind while you capture the ship."

Monaill bowed before the Kildare and hastened from the council room. In a few words Turgan gave to Toness the final orders for the conduct of the conspiracy during his absence. Followed by Lura, Damis and three of the council, he made his way to a hidden doorway. Along an underground passage they made their way for a quarter of a mile. A group of figures was seen dimly ahead of them and nine men joined the party. Turgan identified them to Damis as the balance of the crew.

"Has Monaill passed this way?" he asked.

"He passed with his band a few moments ago, oh, Kildare," replied one of the men. "See, there is the light which summons us to follow."

He pointed to a tiny light which had suddenly flashed into brilliance. Turgan nodded and led the way forward. At another doorway which opened to Turgan's touch on a hidden lever, the party paused. An instant later there came from a few hundred yards ahead of them a hoarse cry of alarm followed by the roar of a huge whistle.

"The battle has joined!" cried Turgan. The others crouched, tense and motionless. From ahead came the sound of battle. Violet light showed in short intense flashes. It was evident that the Jovian guard of the space ship was fighting valiantly to protect it. Shaking aside Turgan's restraining hand, Damis crept slowly forward.

Two hundred yards from the spot where he left Turgan he came to a bend in the passage. The sound of battle came from just ahead. He crept forward and peered around the corner. The passage emerged from the ground and gave way to a huge open space which he recognized as part of the grounds of the Viceregal palace. Standing on a launching platform was a Jovian space ship around which a battle raged.

Five of the huge Jovians were battling furiously with a score of Earthmen. Three dead Jovians and a dozen crushed forms of Terrestrials testified to the bitterness of the fight. The terrible black tubes of the Jovians were exhausted and the battle was now being waged hand to hand, Jovian ax against Earthly sword. The Terrestrials were being gradually

pressed back.

A shout came from the distance and Damis could see a dozen Jovian guards hastening toward the scene of the fight, brandishing in their hands the terrible black tubes. He turned back and shouted to Turgan.

"Hasten!" he cried. "In a moment, Monaill and his men will be overthrown!"

With a shout the crouching group of Terrestrials rushed toward him, but Damis did not wait. The oncoming Jovians were several hundred yards away when he threw himself into the fray. At his appearance, a cry of dismay went up from the Earthmen which was changed to one of mingled wonder and triumph as Damis seized the nearest Jovian and bore the fellow down despite his struggles. It was a matter of seconds for him to break the bull neck of the huge guard and he turned to grasp another. The four remaining Jovians backed away but Damis was not to be denied. He rushed in and grasped another about the waist, avoiding the swing of the forty-pound ax, and dragged him back. The swords of the Terrestrials pierced the struggling guard from the rear and Damis rushed toward the three survivors.

Heartened by his aid, the remnants of Monaill's band charged with him. Two of the Jovians fell before the swords of the Earthmen and the third went down before a blow of Damis' fist. As he turned back to the ship, Turgan, followed by the crew of the ship, dashed up.

"Into the ship!" cried Damis. A glance showed that the Jovian guards were less than two hundred yards away and were coming on in huge leaps. The door of the space ship was open and the band of Terrestrials clambered in.

"Quick, Damis!" came Lura's voice. The Nepthalim turned to enter but his gaze fell on the six survivors of Monaill's band. "In with you!" he cried sharply. * * * * *

The Terrestrials hesitated but Damis grasped the nearest of them by the belt and threw him bodily into the ship. The others hesitated no longer but clambered in. The Jovians were less than fifty yards away and already deep violet flashes began to come from the tubes they carried. Damis stooped and grasped one of the dead Jovians. With an effort possible to only two men on Earth, himself and Glavour, he raised the body above his head and hurled it straight at the oncoming Jovians. His aim was true and three of them were swept from their feet. With a mighty bound, Damis sprang through the door of the space ship and the airlock clanged shut behind him.

The crew of the ship were already in place, awaiting orders. There was no time for instruction and Damis leaped to the control board. He pulled a lever far down and in an instant the entire crew was flat on the floor as though an enormous weight had pressed them down. With a superhuman effort, Damis raised himself enough to cut off the power. The ship shot on through the rapidly thinning air, its sides glowing a dull red. The heat inside the ship was almost

intolerable.

As the pressure of the enormous acceleration ceased, the bruised Terrestrials struggled to their feet. Damis turned to another lever and a breath of icy air swept through the ship.

"This will help for an instant," he gasped, "and the cold of space will soon cool us down. I had to give the ship a tremendous start or the tubes of the Sons of God would have reduced us to elemental atoms. Keep away from the walls and don't exert yourselves. I can handle the ship alone for the present."

For half an hour the ship charged on through space. Damis presently pulled the control lever down and placed the ship under power. The walls changed from dull red to black and the temperature in the ship grew noticeably lower. Damis made his way to one of the walls and tested it with a moistened finger.

"It's cool enough to touch," he announced. "Fortunately the insulating vacuum between the inner and the outer skins was at its maximum, otherwise we would have been roasted alive. The external wall was almost at the fusing point. We can move around now."

He posted lookouts at the observing instruments with which the ship was equipped and instructed them in their duties and the manipulation of the instruments. He placed one man at the control lever of the stern rocket-motors. As he turned away from the control board he saw Lura standing quietly in a corner. He opened his arms and she ran to them with a cry of joy.

"Oh, Damis, I was so afraid for you," she gasped, "and I wanted to hug you when you jumped in and Father closed the lock behind you but I knew that you had to take care of the ship. Were you hurt at all?"

"Not a bit, darling," he assured her, "but it was touch and go for a moment. I didn't know whether the guards would dare to disintegrate the ship without orders from Glavour. In any event, the blasts of the stern motors must have hurled them half a mile. No strength could stand the blast of gas to which they were subjected. Are you all right?"

"Perfectly," she replied; "I never was in any danger. I was the first one in the ship and the only chance I had to be hurt was to have you overcome and the ship recaptured. In that case, I had this."

She displayed a small dagger which she drew from the bosom of her robe. Damis shuddered and took the weapon from her.

"Poisoned," he exclaimed as he glanced at its tip. "You had better let me take care of it. You might fall and prick yourself with it."

She surrendered the weapon to him with a smile and Damis placed it in a cabinet built against the wall of the flyer.

"Now go in and lie down," he told her. "I've got to start plotting a course to Mars and teaching my crew how to operate the ship."

"Can't I learn, too?" she objected. "If anything should happen, it might be quite a useful bit of knowledge. Besides, I already understand celestial geography quite well and I may be able to help in the navigation."

Damis looked at her in surprise.

"You a celestial geographer?" he asked in astonishment. "Where did you learn it?"

"From my father. He was a famous heaven-master before the Jovians came and he taught me."

"That's excellent!" cried Damis. "I didn't realize we had so much knowledge at our command. Turgan, will you take charge of the navigating after I plot a course? Lura can assist you. Now, the rest of you attend to my words and I'll teach you how to operate the rocket motors."

The Jovian ship was built along very simple lines. Batteries of rocket motors at the bow and stern and on each of the sides furnished both motive and steering power. The Terrestrials were all chosen men and in three hours Damis announced himself as satisfied with their ability to operate the ship under any normal conditions. With Turgan and Lura watching and checking his calculations, he plotted a course which would intercept Mars on its orbit.

"Luckily, Mars is approaching us now," he said, "and we won't have a stern chase, which is always a long one. We will be able to reach Mars, spend several days on it and return to Earth before ships can reach the Earth from Jupiter, even if they are already on the way, which is highly probable. I'll turn the ship a little."

Under his direction, the crew turned the ship in its course until it was headed for the point in space where Damis planned to intercept the red planet. With the course set to his satisfaction, he gave orders for the stern motors to be operated at such a power as to give the highest acceleration consistent with comfort for the crew. There were no windows in the ship but two observers seated at instruments kept the entire heavens under constant observation. Damis motioned one of them to stand aside and told Lura to take his place. She sat down before a box in which were set two lenses, eye-distance apart. She looked through the lenses and gave a cry of astonishment. Before her appeared the heavens in miniature with the entire galaxy of stars displayed to her gaze. In the center of the screen was a large disk thickly marked with pocks.

"The moon," explained Damis. "We are headed directly toward it now but we'll shift and go around it. We'll pass only a few hundred miles from its surface, but unfortunately it will be between us and the sun and you'll be able to see nothing. Look in the other observer."

Lura turned to the second instrument. A large part of the hemisphere was blotted out by the Earth which was still only a few thousand miles away. The sun showed to one side of the Earth, but a movable disk was arranged in the instrument by means of which it could be shut off from the gaze of the observer. Despite the presence of the sun, the stars shone brilliantly in the intense black of space.

"How fast are we traveling?" asked Lura.

"It is impossible to tell exactly," he

replied. "I can approximate our speed by a study of the power consumed in our stern motors and again I can approximate it by a series of celestial observations, provided we do not have to change our course while I am doing so."

"Isn't there some sort of an instrument which will tell you how fast we are going?" she asked in astonishment.

"Unfortunately not. We are traveling through no medium which is dense enough to register on an instrument. Our course is not straight, but is necessarily an erratic one as we are subject to the gravimetric pull of all of the celestial bodies. Just now the Earth supplies most of the pull on us but as soon as we approach the moon, we will tend to fall on it and frequent sideblasts will be needed to keep us away from it. Once we get up some speed that is comparable with light, we can measure by direct comparison, but our speed is too low for that now."

"I saw you lay out your course, but how are we steering?"

"The observer who works on the front instrument keeps a cross hair on a fixed star. When the curving of the ship deviates us more than five degrees from our course, a side motor is turned on until we straighten out again. It is quite a simple matter and I'll take the ship myself when we near Mars. There is no need to be frightened."

"I'm not frightened," said Lura quickly; "I was just curious. Is there any danger of hitting a wandering body?"

"Not much in this zone and at this speed. When our speed picks up there will be a slight danger because the higher our rate of speed, the more crowded space becomes. If we were going to Jupiter we would have to use much more caution. The asteroid belt lying between Mars and Jupiter is really crowded with small bodies but comparatively few are in the zone between Earth and Mars. That is one thing I figured on when I said that we would have plenty of time to go to Mars and back before ships could come from Jupiter. Ships from Jupiter would be able to develop a much higher speed than we will attain were it not for the asteroid belt. They will have to travel quite slowly through it, in portions, not over a few thousand miles per minute, while we are not held down that way. Now that we are really started, it will be best to set regular watches. I will assign you as navigator for one watch if you wish."

"I certainly do want to do my share."

"All right, we'll let it go that way. Turgan and I will take the other two watches until we get there."

"How soon will that be?"

"About seventeen days. Mars happens to be only about forty million miles away just now. Now I'll set the watches and divide the crew."

A short examination showed Damis that his crew were intelligent and that his instruction had been good. Every member knew his duties. Instead of the two twelve-hour watches which were usual on space flyers, the additional members of the crew who had been part of Monaill's band enabled Damis to set only eight-hour shifts. Each member of

the crew was taught to operate the offensive ray projectors with which the flyer was equipped.

* * * * *

Things soon settled down to routine. No wandering celestial bodies came close enough to cause them any real alarm. Once the novelty of hurtling through space had passed away, the trip became monotonous. The Earth, which had at first filled the field of one of the observers, dwindled until it became merely a brilliant green star. The red speck which was Mars grew constantly more prominent as the hours went by and Damis gave the word to turn on the bow motors and retard the speed of the flyer. Several of the crew had worked in the communications net which Glavour had thrown around the Earth and under orders from Turgan, they began to call the red planet on the ship's communicator.

"It is well to let them know who we are," he said to Damis when he gave the order. "We are flying a Jovian ship and since we have come so far successfully, I have no desire to be blasted out of space by their powerful weapons of defense."

Damis agreed heartily, and for twelve hours continual attempts were made to communicate with their destination. At last their signals were answered. Despite the differences in language, they had no trouble in understanding the messages. A system of communication based not on words or sound forms, but on thought forms, had been introduced to the Earth by the Jovians and both Damis and Turgan were quite familiar with it. The Martians informed them that the approaching ship had been sighted and carefully watched for several days. As soon as he learned who the occupants were, the Grand Mognac of Mars sent a message of welcome and instructed them on what part of the planet to land. He promised that a deputation would meet them with transportation to his capital city where he would welcome them in person and supply them with the weapons they sought.

CHAPTER III

The Doom on Mars

Two days later Damis dropped the ship gently to the ground in a wide and deep depression which had been designated as their landing place. The Grand Mognac had assured them that the depression held enough atmosphere to enable them to breathe with comfort. There was no one in sight when they landed and after a short consultation, Damis and Turgan entered the airlock. In a few moments they stood on the surface of Mars.

They had landed in a desert without even a trace of the most rudimentary vegetation. Barren slate-colored mountains shut off their view at a distance of a few miles. When they strove to move they found that the conditions which had confronted the Jovians in their first landing on the Earth were duplicated. The lesser gravity of the smaller planet made their strength too great for easy control and the slightest effort sent them yards into the air. This condition had

been anticipated and at a word from Damis, lead weights, made to clamp on the soles of their sandals were passed out from the space ship. Although this enabled them to keep their footing when moving over the dry surface of Mars, the slightest exertion in the thin air caused them acute distress.

"We had better save our strength until the messengers of the Grand Mognac arrive," said Damis at length. "We may have quite a trip before us."

Turgan agreed and they sat down by the side of the ship where its shadow would shield them from the fierce solar rays which beat down on them. The sun looked curiously small, yet its rays penetrated the thin air with a heat and fierceness strange to them. Lura and a half dozen of the crew were passed through the airlock and joined them.

"I am surprised that the Martians have not arrived," said Damis presently. "I am interested to see what their appearance is."

Hardly had he spoken than the air before them seemed to thicken in a curious fashion. Lura gave a cry of alarm and pressed close to Damis. The sun's rays penetrated with difficulty through a patch of air directly before them. Gradually the mistiness began to assume a nebulous uncertain outline and separated itself into four distinct patches. The thickening air took on a silvery metallic gleam and four metallic cylinders made their appearance. Two of them were about eight feet in height and three feet in diameter. The other two were fully thirty feet in length and about the same diameter. On the top of each one was a projecting cap shaped like a mushroom and from it long tenuous streamers of metal ran the full length of each cylinder. From the ether came a thought wave which registered on the brains of all the Terrestrials.

"The Grand Mognac of Mars sends his greeting and a welcome to the visitors from Earth," the message ran. "Before his envoys make their appearance before you, we wish to warn you to be prepared for a severe shock for their physical appearance is not that of the life with which you are familiar. I would suggest that you turn your heads while we emerge from our transporters."

Obediently the Earthmen turned their gaze toward their ship until another thought wave ordered them to turn. Lura gave a cry of horror and Damis instinctively raised one of the Jovian ray tubes. Before them were huge figures which seemed to have stepped out of a nightmare, so grotesque were their forms.

The Martians had long slug-like bodies, twenty-five feet in length, from which projected a multiplicity of short legs. The legs on the rear portions of the bodies terminated in sucker-like disks on which they stood on the surface of the planet. The upper part of the body was raised from the ground and the legs terminated in forked appendages like hands. Stiff, coarse hair, brown in color, protruded from between brilliant green scales, edged with crimson. The heads were huge and misshapen and consisted mostly of eyes with a multitude of facets and huge jaws which worked in-

cessantly as though the slugs were continually chewing on something. Nothing that the Earth could show resembled those monstrosities, although it flashed across Damis' mind that a hugely enlarged caricature of an intelligent caterpillar would bear some resemblance to the Martians. Another thought wave impinged on the consciousness of the Terrestrials.

"Mars is much older than your planet and evolution has gone much farther here than it has on the Earth. At one time there were forms of life similar to yours which ruled this planet, but as air and water became scarce, these forms gave way to others which were better suited to conditions as they existed. I would be pleased to explain further, but the Grand Mognac anxiously awaits his guests. His orders are that two of you shall visit him in his city. The two whom he desires to come are Turgan, the leader of the expedition and Damis, the Nepthalim. Fear nothing, you are among friends."

Damis hesitated and cast a glance at Lura.

"By all means, Damis, do as the Grand Mognac bids you," she exclaimed. "I will stay here with the ship until you return. I am not at all frightened, for the whole crew will be here with me."

Damis kissed her and after a word with Turgan, he announced their readiness to proceed. He inquired the direction in which they should travel, but another thought wave interrupted him.

"We have brought transportation for you," it said. "Each of you will enter one of the smaller transporters which were especially prepared for your use. When you enter them, seal them tightly and place your feet in the stirrups you will find in them. Grasp the handles which will be before you firmly in your hands. In an instant you will be dissolved into elemental atoms and carried on a beam of force to the receiving focus where you will again be materialized. There is no danger and no pain. It is our usual means of transportation."

With a final word of farewell to Lura and the crew, Turgan and Damis unfastened and entered the two smaller cylinders. Before the astonished eyes of the Terrestrials the cylinders grew thin and vanished like a puff of smoke dissipating in a wind. Lura turned to Kastner whom Turgan had left in command.

"What were my father's orders?" she asked.

"Merely that we wait here until his return," he replied. "Since we are among friends, there is no need to keep the ray projectors manned and I am anxious to let all of the crew have the experience of setting foot on a new planet."

"I am a little tired," said Lura. "I will return to the ship and rest while you let the crew try their footing on Mars."

She entered the airlock and in a few moments was again inside the ship. At a word from Kastner the balance of the crew passed through the lock and began to amuse themselves by trying to keep their footing on the surface of Mars.

Damis and Turgan, having entered

the transporters, slipped their feet in place as the Martians had directed. They grasped firmly the handles which projected from the inside of the cylinders. There was a momentary sensation of slight nausea and then a thought wave reached them.

"You have arrived. Unfasten your cylinders and emerge."

They stepped out of the transporters and rubbed their eyes in astonishment. Two of the huge slugs had been amazing, but the effect of half a hundred grouped about them was more than the mind could, for a moment, grasp. They were in a huge room composed apparently of the same silvery material of which the transporters were made. It rose above them in a huge dome with no signs of windows or openings. It was lighted by a soft glow which seemed to emanate from the material of the dome itself, for it cast no shadows. On a raised platform before them rested one of the huge slugs, a broad band of silvery metal set with flashing coruscating jewels clasped about its body. From the ornament and the exalted position, they judged that they were before the Grand Mognac of Mars. With a muttered word to Turgan to follow him, Damis advanced to the foot of the platform and bowed deeply.

"I thank you for that mark of respect, Nepthalim," came a thought wave from the Grand Mognac, "but such forms are obsolete on Mars. Here all living intelligences are equal. Only the accident of superior mental power is allowed to differentiate between us and this added power brings only added and more arduous duties. You came here to get weapons which will free you from the dominance of the Jovians who rule you, did you not?"

"We did, oh Grand Mognac," replied Damis.

"Your prayers shall be answered if you are found worthy. Relate to me now all that has passed since the Jovians first landed on your planet. If you can form thoughts without speaking, you may save the effort of speech. The air has become so thin on Mars that sound will not carry over large portions of it. As a result, we have no organs of hearing, for they have been atrophied from ages of disuse. We use thought as our only means of communication."

Rapidly, Damis marshaled his thoughts in order. Slowly and carefully he pictured in his mind the landing of the Jovians as he had heard it described and then the event leading up to their trip. The Grand Mognac frequently interrupted him and caused him to amplify in detail some of the mental pictures and at times turned to Turgan and requested him to picture the same events. When Damis had finished the Grand Mognac was motionless for ten minutes.

"Pardon me for sealing my thoughts from you," he said at length, "but my consultation with my councillors was not a matter for those from another planet to know, no matter how friendly they may be. My council have agreed with me that your tale is a true one and has been fairly pictured. We have no interest in the fate of your planet except that

we desire to help the form best adapted to bring about the day we all await with anxiety when all of the planets will be united in bonds of love and justice. We believe that the form which developed on the Earth is better adapted to this than the form which developed on Jupiter and we will give you weapons which will enable you to free yourselves and to protect your planet against future invasions. My scientists are now busy preparing for you weapons which we will deliver to your ship. Meanwhile, you are our honored guests. You will be interested in seeing life as it exists here and Attomanis, one of my council, will be your guide and will answer your questions."

The Grand Mognac dropped the upper portion of his body to the dais as a sign that the interview was ended. Damis and Turgan hurriedly tried to form appropriate expressions of gratitude in their minds but a powerful thought wave took possession of their minds.

"Follow me," it said.

One of the caterpillars crawled forward and beckoned to them. With a backward glance at the Grand Mognac who seemed unaware of their existence, Damis and Turgan followed their guide. He led the way to a platform upon which he slowly crawled. In answer to a thought command, Turgan and Damis climbed upon it and in an instant they were skimming at high speed over the ground. The platform came to a stop near the outer edge of the huge dome. They followed their guide from the platform to a box-like contrivance built against the dome. It had lenses similar in appearance to the observers on the Jovian space ship but built on a larger scale. Attomanis removed the lenses from the instrument and substituted two smaller pairs through which he motioned Turgan and Damis to look.

Before them lay a huge plain across which ran a belt of green foliage. The vegetation forms were like nothing the earth could show. There were no true leaves but huge pulpy branches ran up into the air a hundred feet and divided and subdivided until they became no larger around than hairs. At places on the plants were huge crimson, mauve and blue flowers, ten feet across. As they watched a monstrous form flitted into view. It was that of a butterfly, but such a butterfly as they had never imagined.

The spread of the huge wings was fully a hundred feet across and its swollen body was larger by far than the huge slug which stood beside them. The butterfly waved its thirty-foot tentacles and approached one of the blue flowers. A long curled sucker, fifty feet in length, unrolled and was plunged down into the heart of the trumpet-shaped flower. Gradually the blue color faded to mauve and then to a brilliant crimson. The butterfly abandoned it when the change of color was completed and flitted away to another of the blue blooms.

"What manner of thing is that?" demanded Damis.

"That was a member of the council," replied Attomanis. "She was chosen to be one of those to perpetuate our race.

Evolution has gone further with us than on your planet but it will show you what in time you may expect.

"Life started with an amoeba on Mars as it did on Earth and the slow process of evolution followed similar lines. At one time forms like yours were the ruling and guiding intelligences of Mars. They were, however, a highly specialized form. As conditions changed, the form changed. The head and chest grew larger as the air grew thinner until the enfeebled trunk and limbs could no longer support their weight. Gradually the form died out and was replaced by others.

"The forms which you call insects on your Earth were more primitive and hardier forms and more readily adaptable. They increased in size and in intelligence until they were ready to supplant all other forms. The last vestiges of the bipeds were carefully nurtured and guarded by our forefathers until the vanishing atmosphere made their survival impossible. The insect form became supreme.

"We multiplied with extreme rapidity and would have overcrowded the planet had we not learned several things. Our present form of life is immature in many ways. For example, we are totally unable to reproduce our kind. That is the function of the next phase. In this form, however, the intelligence reaches its maximum. As a result, all living creatures, except selected ones, have their growth arrested at the larval stage and pass their entire life in this form. Certain ones at long intervals of time as the population diminishes, are allowed to spin cocoons and hatch out in the form you have witnessed. This form is almost brainless, the securing of nourishment from flowers and reproducing their kind being the limits of their intelligence. The eggs are maturing in the body of the one you saw. Soon she will lay many thousands of them and then, her life mission accomplished, she will die. We will gather these eggs and tend them until they hatch. All defective ones will be destroyed and the balance will be instructed until they are ready to take their place in the community and carry on the work of the planet."

"That is extremely interesting," exclaimed Damis. "Will our Earth in time support the same forms of life as does Mars now?"

"I can see no reason why evolution should follow a different path there than it has here," replied Attomanis, "but millions of years will pass before you lose your atmosphere to such an extent as we have. All of our water is gathered at the polar icecaps, from whence we lead it as it melts through underground pipes hundreds of miles to the spot where we desire vegetation to grow. There we deliver it directly to the roots of the plants so there is no waste. Great bands of cultivated areas crisscross the planet where the soil is of unusual fertility. A certain number of plants are allowed to flower and to bear fruit for the sustenance of the reproductive form of life and to replace themselves. The others we devour while they are young and tender."

"Do you always live in these sealed cities?"

"Always. There are hundreds of them scattered over the planet. As you have noticed, they are composed of damazonium, the same substance as is used in making the transporters. The whole city is but a large transporter. When we desire to feed, the city is disintegrated and materialized over a patch of vegetation which we eat. When the supply is for a time exhausted, the city is moved. This is one way in which we conserve the small supply of atmosphere which is left."

Attomanis suddenly paused and held up one hand for silence. In a moment the thought waves again beat in on the consciousness of Damis and Turgan.

"The weapons which were promised you are ready," he said. "We will return to the throne of the Grand Mognac and you will receive instructions in their use."

He again mounted the platform and Damis and Turgan took their places beside him. Rapidly they were borne over the ground until they came to a stop before the dais on which the Grand Mognac rested. Beside the four cylinders in which they and the Grand Mognac's messengers had traveled from the space ship to the city, another of huge proportions stood before the platform. Beside it were two instruments. From a mass of coils and tubes a long rod projected up. It was pivoted so that it could be directed toward any point. The rod on one of the instruments was blue while the other was a fiery scarlet.

"These are the weapons which will enable you to destroy your oppressors and prevent more from ever landing," said the Grand Mognac. "I must caution you, however, regarding their use. They generate a ray of almost infinite frequency, much higher than the disintegrating ray the Jovians use. Instead of resolving materials into light and energy, these devices will absolutely destroy the ether, that imponderable substance which permeates and fills all space.

"Heat and light travel in waves through the ether. When it is destroyed, only blackness and entire absence of heat remain. Nothing can bear the cold of interstellar space and yet it is warm compared to the absolute cold which the absence of ether produces. When you direct one of these rays toward a Jovian ship, the ether in the ship is destroyed. No insulation against the cold of space will interfere for the ether penetrates and permeates all substance. The cold of absolute nothingness will destroy all life in the twinkling of an eye and the ship will be reduced to a puff of powder. At such a temperature, even stellanium has less strength than the most brittle substance.

"There are two of these devices, set to different powers. The one with the blue rod is for use against space ships either before or after they enter the atmosphere envelope. Beware of using it except when it points in a direction almost normal to the surface of your planet. These devices tap and use the enormous force of gravity itself and when they are locked to your planet, they are anchored to the center of grav-

ity of the planet. Unless it were normal to the planet's surface, its reactive force is so great that it would disrupt the balance which holds the planet in place were the beam sent off on a tangential line.

"The other, whose projecting rod is painted red, can be used at any angle as its force is only a minute fraction of that of the other. It also must be locked to the center of gravity of the earth before it is used by means of the switch on the front. This instrument will give you power to annihilate your oppressors on earth, for while it has not the terrible force of the other, it will penetrate any protective screen which the science of Jupiter can erect. Use it only against the Jovians and when you have finished with it, destroy it that it may not fall into the hands of those who would misuse it. The other may be left intact to repel other Jovian attacks but I think you need fear none. Once they learn you have it, they will be content with their conquests of Venus and Mercury and give you a wide berth. The Jovians have had a taste of it already and they leave Mars alone. Each instrument is set in action by closing the switch on top, after closing the gravity anchor switch. To stop them, open the top switch."

Under the direction of the Grand Mognac, the Martians placed the terrible weapons in the transporter prepared for them. Turgan and Damis strove to thank the Grand Mognac for his gift but he interrupted them promptly.

"No thanks are due us," he said. "We have done that which we believe is the best for the orderly development of this galaxy of planets and there is no reason why we should be thanked. Now enter the transporters and you will be returned to your space ship. Destroy your oppressors and work for the day when Mars and Earth will march in peace toward the final goal of all life."

Accompanied by two Martian envoys, Damis and Turgan entered the cylinders and fastened them closely. They set their feet in place and grasped the handles before them. Again came the feeling of nausea and then a thought ordered them to emerge from the transporters. They emerged almost at the same instant. Before them lay the space ship with its airlock wide open. Not a living soul was in sight. Damis leaped toward the ship, but his foot struck an obstruction which sent him sprawling. He glanced down and a hoarse cry of alarm broke from his lips. He had stumbled over the body of Kastner. The body had been horribly mutilated by some heavy instrument, one arm hanging to the torso by a mere shred of flesh. Scattered around on the ground lay other mutilated bodies.

With a shout of anguish, Turgan sped toward the open space ship. Damis, with a pale face, hastily examined the dead bodies. Eighteen of the Terrestrials lay stiff in death while the bodies of two huge Jovians in the uniform of Glavour's personal guard told the cause of their death. Damis struck by a sudden apprehension, ran from one body to the next, and in a little while he straightened up with a momentary breath of relief. Lura's body was not

among them. He turned to the space ship in time to see Turgan appear in the door of the airlock, his face distorted by grief and his tall body swaying. Damis hurriedly ran to him.

"Is Lura—dead?"

He brought out the last word with an effort. Turgan's face worked for a moment before he could reply. Through the thin air of Mars came his choking voice.

"Worse," he muttered: "she is gone!"

CHAPTER IV

Damis' Decision

Damis stared at Turgan for a moment as though unable to comprehend the old man's words.

"Gone?" he repeated stupidly. "She has slain herself?"

"No," replied the Kildare, his face still working in grief; "she is gone from us. She has been captured by Glavour's minions."

"Her dagger—?" asked Damis hesitatingly.

"Is gone with her," replied Turgan.

The Nepthalim started toward the space ship but a thought wave from one of the Martian envoys stopped him in mid-stride.

"Wait, Man of Earth," came the message. "The heavens are eternally watched by our people and none can enter or leave the vicinity of Mars unknown to us. My comrade is now inquiring of each of the observers whence came the Jovians and where they have gone."

Turgan and Damis waited impatiently. Presently the second Martian sent a thought wave to their minds.

"The Jovian ship approached Mars using Phobus, one of our moons, as a screen to its movements. It was close to the planet before it was seen. When challenged, the ship sent a message saying that it was captained by Toness, an Akildare of Earth and an enemy of the Jovians. The Grand Mognac was engaged and the matter was referred to the Mozar of Chinamonot, the nearest city. Thinking they were your followers, he directed them to land here. The Grand Mognac is enraged beyond measure that, after so many ages of failure, the Jovians have made a successful raid on our planet. The Mozar will pay for his indiscretion with his life."

A groan burst from Turgan's lips. Damis stood for a moment stricken with grief, and then sprang in giant leaps toward the space flyer.

"Come, Turgan!" he cried. "We may overtake them yet. At least we can avenge if we cannot save."

The Kildare followed him more slowly.

"Where, oh, Nepthalim," he asked, "will we find them in the trackless wastes of space?"

Damis paused at the words.

"Why, between here and Earth," he replied. As he did so a thought crossed his mind which was revealed by the sudden expression of dismay which clouded his features. "Earth, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Jupiter—all are under the rule of the Sons of God," he cried.

"And to any of them, Glavour's ship

may have fled," replied the Kildare. "Before we start in pursuit, it is best to find, if we can, in what direction the ship went."

Frantically, Damis strove to muster his thoughts and hurl a question at the two Martians who stood beside the transporter cylinders. Before the thought had been fully formed, an answer reached him.

"I have been inquiring, Nepthalim, why, when our observers saw that the ship contained Jovians, they were not destroyed. One of the observers who watched them tells me that their ship landed between your ship and the only instruments of destruction which could be brought to bear on them. The Jovians poured out and attacked your crew who were all out of the ship. They were so mingled that it would have been impossible to destroy them without encompassing the destruction of your men as well and we could not blast their ship into nothingness without also destroying yours. When they rose again they carried one of your crew a prisoner and so they were not blasted out of the heavens. They took a course which carried them behind Phobus where they were shielded. When next seen, they were headed away from your planet."

"If Glavour came to Mars, Lura is dead by now," said Turgan sorrowfully, tears coursing down his cheeks. "Glavour is not one to await the fulfillment of his desires and Lura had her dagger. Her soul is now with Him whom we are taught to glorify. His will be done!"

"If it be His will," replied Damis. "Don't give up, Turgan, we may save her yet." He turned to the Martians and formed a thought message in his mind.

"Has your science any way of telling us who was in command of the Jovian ship?" he asked.

"Were your men who lie dead familiar with the features of the Jovian Viceroy?"

"Yes, all of them."

"Then we will search the brains of the dead. The pictures that are in the living brain fade rapidly when death comes, but the last impression of these men was a powerful one of fighting and hatred and some traces may remain. I will search."

The huge slug crawled over the ground to the body of the nearest dead Terrestrial. In one of his many hands he carried a shiny metal tube from which crimson rays flickered and played over the head of the dead man. The skull disintegrated under the influence of the strange instrument until the brain lay naked and exposed to the fierce glare of the Martian sun. The Martian delicately connected two wires terminating in metal plates to the tissue of the brain and attached the other ends of the wires to a metal circlet which he clamped about his middle. For some moments he remained motionless and then crawled to the body of the second dead Earthman. One after another he examined each of the eighteen dead bodies. When he had completed he crawled over to Damis and Turgan.

"Put these bands about your

brows," he commanded in thought language as he handed to each of them a metallic band similar to the one clasped about him. The two Earthmen quickly adjusted the bands. "Let your minds remain a blank and in them will be reproduced the impressions I have gathered from the brains of your dead followers."

Damis sprang suddenly upward and smote with all of his force at the air. Out of nothingness had materialized the form of a huge Jovian clad in the uniform of Glavour's guards. His blow went harmless through the thin air and the Jovian swung a massive ax. Just before the blow landed the Jovian disappeared and a thought wave from the Martian impinged on Damis' brain.

"Spare your energies, Nepthalim," the message said. "What you saw was not a Jovian but was the last impression stored in the brain of the man who met his death under a blow of the ax which seemed to be striking at you. I am merely reproducing in you the emotions and experiences that man felt. Had I allowed the phantom blow to land, you would now be cold in death, so great was the strength of the impression. Now make your mind again a blank and I will reveal to you what was in the mind of another at the instant that his death came upon him."

* * * * * Before the Nepthalim's startled gaze, another Jovian appeared.

"Havenner!" he cried as he recognized the principal officer of Glavour. The equerry came forward slowly, blood dripping from a wound in his leg. He swung his ax but it went wide of the mark. Again he struck, but two Terrestrials attacked him from the rear and he whirled. For a moment, Damis had a chance to watch the conflict which was raging about him. Nine of the huge Jovians were engaged in deadly combat with a dozen of the Terrestrials who still remained on their feet. In the door of the space ship stood Lura, watching the conflict with frightened eyes. One after another of the Earthmen were stricken down. Suddenly a Jovian rushed at Damis but the scene went blank before the raised ax could strike him down.

"Have you seen enough or shall I show you the scenes in the brains of the others?" asked the Martian.

"I have seen and recognized nine of the Jovians," replied Damis, "yet among them was not the one I feared. Let me see into the brains of the others that I may be sure that Glavour was not among them."

Another scene materialized before him. It was merely a variation of those he had already seen. In the brain of one of the Terrestrials he saw the landing of the Jovian ship and the sudden outrush of the Sons of God, armed only with the forty-pound axes they used at close quarters. In none of the scenes did he see the huge form of Glavour. He removed the band with a sigh of relief.

"I broke Glavour's arms a few days back," he said to Turgan, "and it is probable that that prevented him from following us, even if he felt that he could leave the Earth in the turmoil which

Toness had undoubtedly raised. It means that Lura is safe for the present, for Havenner would not dare to do other than to bring her to the Viceroy. We must follow them and endeavor to rescue her. I will ask our friends if they can plot her course for us."

"I have inquired as to that," replied the Martian to Damis' unspoken question, "and find we cannot. Soon after the ship left the surface of Mars, our observers sighted a Jovian fleet of a hundred flyers in the asteroid belt between here and Jupiter. They are nearly through the belt now and are headed toward your planet. Their path will bring them within a few thousand miles of Mars and every instrument on the planet is trained on them. While the Grand Mognac believes that Earth is their destination, never before have the Jovians approached us in such force and it may be that Tubain will try to avenge his former defeats by an attack in force. We have no instruments to spare to keep track of a lone flyer unless it changes its course and approaches us. There is one more source of information. I will examine the brains of the dead Jovians. Perhaps they know their leader's plans."

From the first Jovian the Martian turned away with an expression of disappointment.

"There is nothing in his brain but a scene of the fight with your followers, yet it may cheer you to know that at the last he felt fear, the emotion the Jovians boast is foreign to them," said the Martian. "I will examine the other."

With his crimson ray he removed the covering from the brain of the second Jovian and connected his wires. For a few moments he was motionless and then he removed the wires and crawled rapidly toward Damis.

"Nepthalim, here is what you wish," came his thoughts, jumbled in a chaotic state of excitement. "This man had a wonderful brain and the impressions of the last month are clear and distinct. Attend carefully and leave your mind a blank."

On the Martian plain buildings suddenly materialized before the Nepthalim's gaze. With a cry of astonishment he saw himself facing Glavour in defiance. Lura, who had been crouching behind him, ran into one of the buildings. Act by act, Damis saw the fight between himself and the Jovian Viceroy repeated. The Viceroy, one arm dangling uselessly, was whisked away in his chariot. The scene faded and another took its place. The Viceregal palace was beleaguered by thousands and scores of thousands of shouting Terrestrials. The Jovians sought with rays and with atomic bombs to disperse them, but where a score were blasted into nothingness or torn into fragments, a hundred fresh men took their place. Suddenly the Jovian rays began to fail. The Earthmen had found the secret source of power which supplied the palace and had cut it.

Again the scene faded and he was on a space ship with Havenner talking to him. The words he could not hear for the Martian could not comprehend a record of a sound. The pictures conjured up by the words were easy of com-

prehension and in picture forms the Martian conveyed to him the sense of the conversation. Havenner was telling him of their destination. First came a scene which he recognized as a Martian landscape. The Jovians swarmed from their space ship and struck down the Earthmen without exertion. Three were made captives: himself, Turgan, and Lura. The Jovians reentered the ship and sped away into space. Damis wondered what this last picture signified.

Another scene materialized and they were on another planet. It was not Mars and it was not Earth. For a moment he was puzzled. The sun, when it shone, was larger and fiercer than he had ever seen it, but it shone only for an instant. Blankets of cloud and fog hid it from view. Rain fell incessantly. Lush, rank vegetation covered the ground and rose in a tangle far overhead. The Jovians emerged from the space ship, the prisoners in their midst. A huge lizard, a hundred feet long, rushed at them but a flash of the disintegrating tubes dissolved it into dancing motes of light. The Jovians made their way through the steaming jungle until a huge city, roofed with a crystal dome which covered it and arched high into the air, appeared before them. Toward this city the Jovians marched.

"The crystal cities of Venus!" cried Turgan. Damis nodded in assent.

Again the scene changed and the Martian plain was before them. From the space ship the Jovians emerged, but instead of the easy victory they had had in the earlier scene, they found the task a difficult one. From all sides the Terrestrials charged at them and Damis found himself fighting against his compatriots. A sword flashed before his eyes and the scene was gone.

"Have you learned that which you sought?" came a Martian thought inquiry.

Damis hastily formed his thoughts into an affirmative message of thanks and turned to Turgan.

"We know now where to go," he cried exultingly. "Lura is safe until they land on Venus and enter the crystal cities, for Havenner would not dare to do otherwise than carry out the orders of Glavour. The Martian weapons which we have will insure us an easy victory. Come, let us hasten." A thought message from the Martians stopped him.

"Those weapons on which you are planning, Nepthalim, were given to you by our Grand Mognac for the purpose of ridding your planet of your oppressors and of defending your planet against further Jovian attacks, not for the purpose of invading another planet with which we have no quarrel. If you will use them for the purpose for which they were given you, you may depart with them in peace. If you plan to go to Venus, the weapons will remain on Mars."

"We will go to the Earth and rid her of her oppressors," replied Damis, "but first we must go to Venus and rescue Lura."

"Venus lies beyond the sun," was the Martian answer, "while your planet and Mars are on the same side. It will take you five times as long to go to Venus as to go to the Earth. Meanwhile the

Jovian fleet will have landed and your efforts will be in vain to dislodge them. Even now you must fly at your best speed to reach your planet before them."

"But we cannot abandon Lura. She is the only daughter of my comrade and she is my affianced bride. She means more to us than does the fate of our planet."

"Then go to Venus after her, Nepthalim, but go without Martian aid. Only to save you from your oppressors will we help you. Never has Mars attempted conquest of another celestial body, although not even Jupiter could stand against our might if we chose to attack it."

"You cannot understand her relationship to us, Martian."

"No, I cannot. We are sexless and sex exists on Mars only for the purpose for which it was intended, the perpetuation of our species. It may be that we have been mistaken. If the fate of one member of your species means more to you than the rescue of your whole race, it is perhaps well that you be eliminated by the Jovians. In any event, our decision is final. Make your choice of whether you depart with the weapons or as you came."

"Then I will go to Venus," cried Damis. "If necessary, I will fight the Jovians with bare hands, but I will rescue Lura or die in the attempt."

* * * * *

"And what of the Earthmen who trusted you, Nepthalim?" asked Turgan. "Dozens gave their lives gladly to capture the space ship in which we came here and thousands have gone cheerfully to annihilation to keep the Sons of God beleaguered in the Viceregal palace until we return with the weapons which will bring them victory. Think you that they would choose the destruction of enslavement of the whole race to the possible chance of rescuing one person from the grasp of Glavour's minions?"

"Turgan, you are mad!" cried Damis. "Have you forgotten that Lura is your only child?"

"Since the days of Hortan, Glavour has sought information as to the secret assembly room. Hundreds of men have gone to torture and death with their lips sealed when they could have bought life and freedom by speaking."

"Were it my own life, Turgan, I would not hesitate."

"Think you that never before has an Earthman been faced with the choice of betraying his countrymen or seeing his wife or daughter violated and sacrificed in the games? All have been true to the last and yet they could have done little harm had they spoken. You have the fate of the Earth in your hand, yet you hesitate. I am Lura's father and I know her better, it seems, than do you. If you abandon her countrymen, she will despise you for a coward. It is better that one or that many be lost than that all be lost."

Damis bowed his head in silence. Raised by the Jovians whose only ideal of life was their own selfish pleasure, the thought that the fate of thousands whom he did not know and in whom he felt little

interest could be of more importance than the fate of the one whose safety meant more than life to him was a novel one. The lifelong training he had received from the Sons of God struggled, and struggled in vain, against the ideals he had inherited from his Earthly mother and his loved sire. With a face drawn with anguish, he raised his head.

"We will take your weapons, Martian, and with them go to Earth. If it be His will that Lura be safe, safe shall she be although the whole force of Jupiter threaten her. If not, His will be done. One promise I exact of you, Turgan. When we have reached Earth and I have taught your followers to use the Martian weapons, you will give me a crew and let me depart to Venus to find her."

"Gladly will I promise, and if I be spared, I will go with you, Damis," said Turgan. "Do not think that Lura is not dear to me; she is dearer than all else in the Universe save only the keeping bright the ideal of loyalty that has been the guiding light of the Terrestrials for untold ages."

"Your decision is well made, Nepthalim," said the Martian, "and word of it shall be given to the Grand Mognac that he may know that he made no mistake when he entrusted you with the weapons of Mars. Now for your course. When you rise, direct your ship toward Deiphos. The Jovian fleet is now at an ascension of forty-two degrees and at an angle of one hundred and sixty degrees from the sun. Deiphos will hide you from their instruments. Once you reach it, our observers will plot your course and send you a bearing which will take you as far from the Jovian fleet as possible. They are now passing Ceres and will soon be out of the asteroid belt. They are larger and more powerful than the ship you are flying and they will make better speed. However, if you use your maximum power, you will easily arrive on your planet before them. Have you fuel enough for your trip at full speed?"

Damis hastily inspected the fuel supply of the ship and made some rapid calculations.

"We have enough to carry us at maximum speed to Earth and to retard us to a safe landing, but very little to spare. Can you give us some?"

"There is no tantalum on Mars except a little scattered through tons of rock. It would take us days to extract enough to do you any good. It is well that you did not plan to fly to Venus for you could have made little speed and the Jovian flyer would have reached there long before you did. Now go, and may our best wishes aid you in your flight."

Damis turned and instinctively held out his hand. A trace of expression flickered over the face of the nearest Martian slug and he bent forward and clasped the proffered hand in one of the many hands with which he was provided. No further message came to Damis from the Martians and he entered the airlock with Turgan following him. As the lock clanged shut, he turned to his companion.

"Open the reserve air tanks and restore the atmosphere gradually to the pressure of Earth," he directed. "Unless you do that, we will be unable to func-

tion efficiently."

While Turgan opened the valve which allowed the reserve supply of compressed air to gradually enter the ship, Damis pulled down the starting lever of the ship. With a terrific lurch the flyer left the surface of Mars and shot up into the trackless realms of space. Abandoning his controls for an instant, Damis looked into one of the observers. The plain below them was empty of Martians, but in the distance he could dimly see two of the silvery domes which marked their cities. He made some short calculations and turned on a side motor for a moment. The ship swerved and headed for the Martian satellite to which he had been directed.

In an hour he was holding the ship less than a thousand miles from Deiphos while he received a message from the Grand Mognac as to the location of the Jovian fleet, their speed and course, and the course which he should fly to reach the Earth ahead of them. He noted down the directions and set the cross hairs of his forward observer on Alpha Centauri. His hand sought the controlling lever and the ship rapidly gathered momentum for the trip to Earth.

CHAPTER V

A Desperate Plan

Flying the space ship with a crew of two men instead of the normal nine threw a heavy strain on Damis. Turgan proved to be almost tireless, but while he could act as an observer, Damis devoutly hoped that no wandering celestial body would approach within the danger zone while he was alone on duty. Nothing of the sort happened. The days passed with monotonous slowness, yet daily and, indeed, hourly, the planet Mars faded to a red star and the green point of light which marked their destination grew larger. Damis cast many a longing glance at Venus, but he remained steadfast to the faith which Turgan had engendered in him. During the long hours Turgan had opportunity to tell the Nepthalim of some of the sacrifices made by Terrestrials for the cause of liberty. They filled Damis with amazement and moved him to awe to think of the loyalty and bravery displayed by those whom he had been taught from childhood to regard as a race of slaves, created solely to minister to their overlords.

Damis pushed the ship to the greatest acceleration which he dared to use, and, as they approached the Earth, he cast many an anxious glance at the diminishing fuel supply. For thirteen days he drove at high speed until the Earth seemed almost at hand. Using almost the full power of his bow motors, he checked its speed. For a time he thought he had overestimated the power of his motors and that it would be necessary to avoid the atmosphere belt, run past the Earth and return. At the middle of the fifteenth day, with the Earth less than a thousand miles away, he threw in his last notch of power.

The deceleration pressed them so tightly to the nose of the ship that they could hardly breathe. Damis lay with his hand on a side motor to throw them out of danger. Gradually the forward motion of the ship ceased and at last Damis

rose with an effort and shut off the bow motors.

"We are falling under the influence of terrestrial gravity," he announced. "In another three hours, we will land."

He was as good as his word. Three hours later he dropped the space ship to a landing at a spot half a dozen miles distant from the beleaguered capital of the Sons of God. As he landed, the sun was just peeping over the eastern horizon.

Their approach had been seen and the ship was surrounded by hundreds of Terrestrial swordsmen. As the airlock opened and Damis and Turgan appeared there was silence for a moment and then a thunderous shout of joy rose to the heavens. From the forefront of the crowd, a crimson-robed man ran toward the ship.

"Turgan, my lord," he cried as fell on his knees and strove to kiss the Kildare's hand. "You are spared to us who had given you up for lost. Our spies reported that the Sons of God had followed you to Mars and had slain you all. Havenner reported to Glavour that you had made such a resistance that it was impossible to follow his orders and bring you back alive."

"Havenner!" cried Damis. "Havenner is on Venus with Lura."

"The ship of the Sons of God returned last night," replied the Akildare, "with a loss of two men of its crew and with the Princess Lura a prisoner."

Tears of joy sprang into Damis' eyes and ran unrestrained down his face.

"And she is safe?" he cried.

"One of our spies saw her and reports that she is well although in poor spirits. She is confined in the palace and will not be harmed. A Jovian fleet of a hundred ships is expected hourly with Tubain himself in command. A message to Glavour has ordered that Lura be held for Tubain's arrival, when he will dispose of her."

"What is the situation here, Toness?" interrupted Turgan. "I rejoice with Damis that my daughter is safe, yet, unless we are victorious, her present safety will avail her little."

"Things have gone neither well nor ill since your departure, Kildare," replied Toness. "I have followed out the great conspiracy as it was planned many years ago. Although we have lost thousands of our bravest men, we have the Sons of God besieged in the Viceregal palace and we have tapped and cut the secret source of power which Timour, the Akildare, found years ago. They have no weapons save some hand tubes that are not yet exhausted and their axes. Their most powerful weapons of offense are crippled, yet we cannot storm the palace in the face of the defenses they have left. Have you brought us any hope from Mars?"

"We have brought weapons against which all the power and science of the Sons of God are as helpless as is our feeble strength against their might," replied Turgan. "Send me men to transport these weapons, and in two hours not a Jovian will remain on the planet."

A wild cheer of joy from the assembled Terrestrials answered the

words of the Kildare. A score of men ran forward and entered the space ship on the heels of Turgan. They reappeared in a few minutes carrying with the greatest of care the two terrible weapons which were the gift of the Grand Mognac. Damis suddenly looked up from a reverie in which he had been plunged.

"I have just figured it out," he exclaimed. "Despite his report to Glavour, Havenner knew that Turgan and I lived. He started away from Mars toward Venus, a destination which he had already informed his crew that they would make for. He feared the Martian weapons and he strove to draw us away toward Venus so that he would be safe. Once the Martian instruments had ceased to watch him, he altered his course and made for Earth. With his greater supply of fuel and more powerful ship, he was able to make a higher speed and, despite the additional million or two of miles, he was able to land before us. The thing that puzzles me is why we were not seen by the Jovians as we approached."

"You came from a different direction than Havenner, oh Nepthalim," replied Toness. "All of their instruments were either watching Havenner or the Jovian fleet. But for an accident, your approach would not have been noted by us. I am confident that the Sons of God have no idea that you have returned, especially since Havenner reported that he had slain you. We will take them by surprise. Where shall we take the weapons?"

"Take the one with the blue rod to the top of the mountain which overlooks the palace and set it so that the rod points in the direction from which Tubain's fleet is approaching. That hill is less than two miles from the palace, so you had better take them both there. Point the red rod toward the palace."

At a word from Toness, the Terrestrials started off with the weapons for the point indicated by Damis. The Nepthalim and Turgan followed them, relating their adventure on the red planet as they walked along. The shutting off of the Jovian source of power had effectually crippled all of the power-driven chariots which certain of the higher officials among the Earthmen had been allowed to maintain.

On the top of the hill overlooking the palace grounds the two Martian weapons were placed on the ground, side by side. Damis carefully aligned the red rod on the Viceregal palace. When he had it set, with a word of warning, he closed the gravity anchor switch. The instrument settled a trifle on the solid rock on which it was bedded and then was motionless. At a word from Damis, as many of the Terrestrials as could find a hand-rest pushed against it. It was as though they were pressing against the mountain itself. Damis sighted along the rod and adjusted it until it pointed at the center of the building.

"So much for that one," he said. "It is the less powerful of the two, but it will be enough to destroy the Sons of God and the Nepthalim who are in the palace. The few who are scattered over the Earth, we can dispose of at our leisure. If the Jovian fleet approaches the Earth from directly above us, we will be able to destroy it easily. In any event, this

weapon is to be used only when it is approximately normal to the surface of the Earth. We must have it almost under the point from which the Jovians are approaching. That may be on the opposite side of the Earth."

"I think not, Nepthalim," said Toness. "We know that Glavour and Tubain have been in constant communication since the Jovian fleet passed Mars and he expects them to land here. There would be no object in their taking a circuitous route, so they will probably drop directly down in the palace grounds."

"Let us hope so, Toness. In any event, we might as well anchor the weapon here as elsewhere." * * * * *

He set the weapon with the blue rod on another patch of bare rock and tested the rod to make sure that it revolved freely and could be made to cover the entire heavens from horizon to horizon. He closed the gravity anchor switch and again the efforts of a dozen Terrestrials were futile to move it.

"Now we are ready for their attack," he said to Turgan. "You are as familiar with these weapons as I am, but I will instruct a dozen of your followers in using them. It is possible that we may not be able to operate the weapons ourselves."

"I can operate one weapon while you manipulate the other, Damis," replied the Kildare. "However, no harm will be done in instructing others."

"I may not be here," said Damis briefly.

Without replying to the questions of Turgan and Toness, he proceeded to instruct a dozen of the Earthmen in the use of the terrible Martian weapons. When he was certain that he had a half dozen men capable of attending to each of the weapons, he turned to Turgan.

"I may not be here when the weapons are used," he said. "When I thought that Lura had gone to Venus, I gave her up and sacrificed both her and my heart on the altar of our cause, for it is what she would have chosen. Now I have accomplished the sacrifice and returned with the Martian weapons to find that she is a captive in the Viceroy's palace. We can turn on the rays and reduce the building and all in it to a pinch of dust in a few seconds, but Lura would be immolated with the Sons of God. The weapons are here; our men know how to use them, and my usefulness is at an end. Now I stand here with no more responsibility for our success than the humblest swordsman. Since I am no longer needed, I will leave the fate of the Earth to you and follow out my private designs."

"Where are you going, Nepthalim?" cried Toness. The question was echoed by all within the sound of his voice. Only Turgan smiled as though he knew Damis' answer.

"Where could I go, Akildare, but to one place?" replied the Nepthalim. "I go to Glavour's palace. I have two errands there. One is to rescue Lura and the other is to mete out to Glavour the death which I swore that I would accomplish. The rays can be turned on and the palace demolished at any time, but I ask that you wait until I return with Lura or

until you know that we are dead."

"But if the Jovian fleet arrives before that time, Nepthalim?" demanded Toness.

"Then give the word for the use of the weapons, Akildare, and Lura's soul and mine will join the thousands of others whose lives are but a part of the price the race of Earthmen have had to pay to rid their planet of the Sons of God."

"It grieves me, Damis, to see you go to certain death," said Turgan sadly to the blond giant, "yet I will say nothing to stop you. Were it not that my presence would hinder you in your attempt, I would accompany you."

"Your place, Kildare, is at the head of your men, whom you were born to rule. I can hope to succeed only by stealth, else a thousand men would come with me. Now call from the ranks one who is a barber that he may change the color of my hair and alter my face that I shall not be known."

At the Kildare's word, three men stepped forward from the ranks of swordsmen and announced themselves adepts in the art of disguise. Swift runners were sent to bring supplies and the three labored over Damis. When they had finished their ministrations, only a close observer would have known him under the bushy black beard which covered his face.

CHAPTER VI

In the Seraglio

With a parting word to Turgan and his followers, Damis made his way alone down the hill and into the thick tropical jungle which grew up almost to the gates of the Viceregal palace. He was well acquainted with a secret entrance into the building. It was a matter of minutes for him to locate the outer end and open it.

For half a mile he made his way underground until a huge stone door barred his way. He felt for the hidden catches and the slab of rock rose before him. As he turned toward the doorway he found himself looking into the muzzle of a black ray tube in the hands of a gigantic Jovian in the uniform of the Viceroy's guards.

"Whence came you, Nepthalim?" demanded the guard, a cold note of suspicion in his voice.

"From far Torna," replied Damis readily. "I am Durmino, Komar of the province of Capries. The slaves rose on us and all were slain except me. I have had to travel by night and hide by day to reach here. I knew not whether the slaves had conquered or not, but when I found them lying by thousands about Glavour's palace, I knew that the reign of the Sons of God was safe. What news from Tubain?"

The face of the Jovian guard cleared as Damis spoke. Durmino, a son of Glavour by one of his Terrestrial concubines, was Komar of Capries, a fact well known to Damis. There was nothing in the newcomer's story to excite suspicion.

"The fleet of the Ruler of the Universe is approaching," the guard replied. "In two hours it will be hovering above us. We would have needed no aid

had not the dogs of Earthmen found our source of power and managed to destroy it with stolen ray tubes. We have been cooped up here like rats waiting for Tubain to arrive. When he comes our vengeance will be heavy."

"The heavier the better," growled Damis with an oath. "The dogs have been getting surly for a generation. I hope that Tubain will teach them a lesson that will not be forgotten for ages to come."

"He will, never fear," laughed the guard. "Already Glavour has made his plans. I am not a member of the council, yet I have heard enough to realize why Glavour is our ruler. My brain could not conceive of such a stupendous plan."

"I will go to my father now," said Damis. "What is the word for passing the inner gate? I wish to surprise my sire for he doubtless mourns me as dead."

"He thinks you are dead," replied the guard, "yet I never heard of Glavour mourning for any loss which did not affect his pleasures. He has plenty of bastards to take your place. The word is 'Tubain.'"

"I thank you, Son of God," said Damis, "and I will inform my sire of the great respect and high regard which you have for him. Fear not, your words shall be truthfully reported to him."

Leaving the Jovian guard hastily reviewing the conversation with the supposed Durmino, Damis made his way toward the palace. Since he knew that he would not reach another door until after several of the underground passages with which the foundations of the palace were honeycombed had joined, he had little doubt of his ability to make his way unsuspected into the citadel. He debated for a moment on the advisability of killing the Jovian guard and taking his weapons, but caution prevailed, and empty-handed, save for a dagger concealed under his robes, he strode forward.

His knowledge of the password enabled him to pass the various guards he met without difficulty. There were many of the Nepthalim who held subordinate positions in the outlying provinces and who were seldom at court, and the Jovian guards, who in their hearts regarded the Nepthalim as little better than the Terrestrials, paid small attention to him. He passed several guarded points before the path rose steeply and he passed through the final gate into the palace itself. A Nepthalim passed him hurriedly and Damis plucked at his robe.

"I am just from outpost," he said. "What news of Tubain?"

"The fleet has entered the atmosphere belt a thousand miles east of here," replied the Nepthalim. "They are dropping to an altitude of five miles and will then approach. They should arrive in an hour. It is well that they hurry."

"What rush is there?" asked Damis in surprise. "We may not be able to leave here, but, at the same time, all the forces the slaves can muster would never force an entrance."

"You have not heard then?" exclaimed the other in surprise. "No—certainly not, if you have been on outpost—

for I just learned it myself. There is a rumor that Havenner lied when he said that he killed Turgan, the Kildare and Damis, the renegade—the curse of Tubain rest on him—on Mars. It is said that they not only escaped death but have returned to Earth armed with the weapons of the red planet. Havenner is with Glavour now and no one knows what the outcome will be. Since Tubain is at hand, doubtless nothing will be done until he arrives. That is the reason why Tubain altered his course and came down so far away instead of directly overhead. He hopes thus to elude the Martian weapons if the Earthmen really have them."

"Surely that is a lie!" cried Damis.

"We hope that it is, yet Havenner would have been slain without mercy had he admitted that he left Mars without slaying or capturing Turgan and Damis. Many believe that it is true."

"Is Glavour in the council room?" asked Damis. "I have a message."

"It would be better for you to defer the message if it be ill news until Tubain arrives, brother, for Glavour is enraged beyond measure at all of us. He threatens to sacrifice us at the next games and he may do so unless Tubain alters the decree. He has not loved us since Damis broke his arm a month ago."

"Nevertheless, I will deliver my message," replied Damis. "While it may not please him, it is essential that he get it before Tubain arrives."

"Good luck go with you, brother," replied the Nepthalim with a shrug of his shoulders. "The temper of the Viceroy of God is an uncertain quality at best. He is in his seraglio."

Damis saluted the messenger and made his way toward the inner portion of the palace where the women whom the lustful Viceroy had dragged into his harem were kept. He had no plausible excuse for passing the guards into this forbidden portion of the palace, but that was a matter which caused him small worry. There were few of the secrets of the palace which were not well known to Damis, who had at one time been major domo of the building. There were some well known to him, the existence of which was not even suspected by the majority of the Sons of God.

As he neared the seraglio, he turned off to his right and passed through a maze of little-used passages until he halted before what was apparently a blank wall. Casting a rapid glance around to ensure himself that there was no one in sight, he touched a hidden catch and a portion of the wall swung inward, opening a way before him. He entered a passage built in the thickness of the wall and lighted with radium bulbs. The door closed softly behind him. He removed his sandals lest even their quiet tread should betray him and on bare feet crept forward.

The passage bent and twisted as it followed the walls until Damis knew that he was in one of the walls of the seraglio. Praying that it would work noiselessly, he slid open a panel of stone and found himself looking through a semi-transparent hanging into the sacred precincts of the seraglio itself. Glavour stood facing him, his heavy face drawn

up in a scowl of rage. Damis noted with satisfaction that one of the Viceroy's arms was supported by a silk scarf and that he made no attempt to use it. With a pale face, Havenner stood before his ruler.

"The word has been brought to me from a source which I trust as much as I do your own word, Havenner," Glavour was saying. "I tell you, I do not believe your story. If Damis and Turgan were dead, the Terrestrials would not see them alive again on Earth. Neither would they have weapons of which we know nothing. One of our observers admits that he saw a space ship land a few hours ago, coming from the direction of Mars. You failed in your mission, Havenner, and on you I pronounce the doom. I sentence you to the twilight of the gods."

"I appeal to Tubain from that sentence!" cried the equerry with dry lips.

"Your appeal shall be noted and laid before him at the proper time," replied the Viceroy savagely; "yet, by the time he arrives, it will be too late. Ho, Guards! Take him away."

Havenner turned as though to resist, but six of the huge Jovians answered the Viceroy's call. Two of them grasped him by the arms and started to lead him from the room.

"I appeal!" cried Havenner again. "I brought back the maiden whom I was sent to fetch, and for that reason I made no failure. To bring her was the principal item of my orders."

Glavour's face grew purple with rage.

"And who sent the message to Tubain which resulted in the orders which he sent me?" he demanded savagely. "It was sent by one of your henchmen and by your orders. You slew the sender before I could question him, but I know whose orders he obeyed. Take him away!"

The guards started to drag the luckless equerry from the presence of the Viceroy, but Havenner made a final appeal for his life.

"I will confess, Viceroy of God," he cried. "No message was sent to Tubain. I dared not send such a message lest such orders would be returned as I caused to be given to you. I coveted the maiden for myself and I took this means of getting her. I had a false message delivered to you which would prevent you from taking her before Tubain arrived. In reward for my services as spy on you, I planned to ask that she be given to me. I surrender all claims to her, Glavour. Spare my life and you may have her."

For a moment Glavour could not speak for rage.

"So you have been the spy who has reported my every doing and my every secret council to Tubain!" he gasped. "But for you, I would long ago have conquered Venus and Mercury and declared myself independent of the Jovian overlord. In time I might have even overthrown him, but every move was known to him before I made it. Not once, but a dozen times, would you go through the twilight were Tubain not at hand. Niton, it is my order that the twilight be

as slow as our instruments will allow. Give him time to learn to suffer and to pray for the blessing of death at my hand. Take him away!"

The struggling Havenner was removed by the guards despite his efforts at resistance and his cries for mercy. Glavour stared after him for a moment and an evil gleam came into his eyes.

"Sonom!" he called sharply.

A guard entered the room and saluted.

"Sonom, bring me the Daughter of Man, Lura!" cried the Viceroy. "When you have brought her here, post guards at all doors and see that no one is admitted under any circumstances until Tubain himself arrives and demands admittance."

The guard hesitated.

"Your Excellency," he faltered, "the orders from Tubain were—"

"False rumors given out by the traitor, Havenner, who has now gone to the twilight of the gods," interrupted the Viceroy. "By the crown of Tubain, do I need to repeat my orders? I am Viceroy of the Earth and am supreme until Tubain revokes my rank. Obey my orders!"

The guard saluted and withdrew. Glavour licked his thick lips in anticipation and strode restlessly back and forth across the room. Inside the hangings, Damis' face hardened and he drew his dagger from under his robe. The door opened and Sonom returned, dragging Lura after him. The face of the Earth-girl was pale and drawn, yet, when she saw Glavour, her head rose in an expression of defiance. Sonom saluted the Viceroy and left the room, the massive door clanging shut behind him. Glavour stared at the girl with an evil leer on his heavy countenance.

"I have learned, Daughter of Man," he said slowly, "of how you seduced one of my servants from his duty to me and caused him to forge an order from the great Tubain in order that he might keep you for his own pleasure. For a time the stratagem succeeded, but now my eyes are open. When I first looked upon your face and form I swore to myself that you should be the solace of my leisure hours. Now the time is come. I was minded once to honor you as Hortan once honored a Terrestrial and let you amuse yourself by sitting on a throne, but your treachery has changed my intention. Not even as an accepted concubine shall you rank, but only as a slave to be used as a toy and tossed to one of my guards when I am tired of you. Come hither!"

Lura made no move to obey the order, and Glavour with an oath stepped toward her, his one good arm outstretched in a grasping gesture. Lura did not move until his hand almost closed on her arm and then she sprang back. Her hand sought the bosom of her robe and the Viceroy recoiled as a glittering dagger flashed in the air.

"Back, Jovian!" cried Lura in ringing tones. "Think you that the daughter of a king of men is to be a toy for your base Jovian passions? The point of this dagger is poisoned so that one touch through your skin will mean death. One step nearer and I will strike!"

The Viceroy hesitated for a moment and then drew from his robe a short thick tube. Lura correctly interpreted the gesture.

"Raise that tube and I will bury the blade in my own body!" she cried. "I know that you have the power to clasp me in your arms, but it will be a corpse which you clasp."

She lowered the knife until the point rested against the skin of her throat. The slightest pressure would cause it to penetrate her skin and bring about her almost instant death. Glavour watched her like a cat, the tube ready in his hand. With a grim laugh he threw the tube from him and walked a few steps away. Lura lowered the knife. As she did so, Glavour turned with a movement so swift that the eye could hardly follow it. His eyes caught Lura's and she straightened back her head, powerless against his will, caught as she was, momentarily off her guard.

"Throw down your knife," said Glavour's voice slowly. Lura struggled to raise the weapon against herself, but she could not. Slowly her fingers relaxed and the weapon clattered on the floor. Still holding her eyes with his own, Glavour stepped forward until his huge splayed foot rested on the weapon. He averted his gaze and swiftly picked it up. Lura gave a scream of horror and strove to fly, but the heavy door was barred against her. Glavour placed the weapon in a cabinet on the wall which he locked and then turned to her, an expression of triumph on his face.

"It is useless, Daughter of Man, to struggle against the will of the Sons of God," he said mockingly. "What we desire is ours. Come to me."

Lura's face showed an expression of loathing as she looked at the huge misshapen monstrosity before her. The Viceroy forgot the momentary satisfaction of his triumph in his rage at her attitude. With a growl of anger he grasped at her. Lura avoided his rush and ran along the side of the room, Glavour in pursuit. He cornered her at last and she stopped with her back to the tapestry with which the room was hung. Glowering in his triumph, Glavour approached and reached out his hand to seize her. His huge paw descended, but before it touched her shoulder a hand with fingers of steel reached through the hangings and grasped his wrist.

When Sonom had dragged Lura into the room, Damis inserted the point of his dagger into the tapestry and started to cut a slit through which he could enter the room. The keen-edged knife cut for a few inches readily enough and then stopped. Damis withdrew the blade and examined the stuff before him. An expression of dismay crossed his face, for the material was crisscrossed with stellanium wires, set six inches apart. Each juncture was braised together and the whole made a web through which he could not force his way.

Cautiously he exerted his strength. The keen blade hewed through the first of the stellanium strands, but Damis held his breath as the wire parted. It seemed impossible that the ting of parting metal which sounded like a thunderclap in his ears would not be heard by the Vice-

roy. He knew that there must be an entrance into the room through the hangings and he made his way cautiously forward, testing the draperies from time to time with his knife.

When Lura laid her dagger against her breast and threatened to end her life, it took all of Damis' self-control to keep from crying out and striving to force his way into the room by sheer strength. He knew the toughness of stellanium well enough to realize the impossibility of even his enormous strength tearing apart a webbing of it. The certainty that Glavour would not push matters far enough to rob himself of his prey aided him to restrain his ardor and to pursue his systematic search.

He came at last to a corner where his knife met with no resistance as it made its way through the silken stuff on the walls. Swiftly he cut a slit through which he could rush. As he parted the material, Lura rushed past him and stood with her back to the wall to await the oncoming Viceroy. Damis raised his hand and stood ready. As Glavour's huge paw descended on Lura's shoulder Damis' hand shot out. Still holding the wrist of the Viceroy in a grip of steel, he emerged from his hiding place, tearing off the black wig and beard which disguised him. "Damis!" cried Lura in wonder and delight as she saw him. * * * * *

Glavour stared with unbelieving eyes for a moment and then a hoarse cry of alarm burst from his lips. Desperately he strove to release his wrist from the Nepthalim's grip, but to no avail. He disengaged his crippled arm from the scarf which supported it and groped under his robe for a weapon. Lura cried out in warning, but Damis had anticipated such a move. With a quick effort he whirled about and drew the Viceroy's arm over his shoulder. He bent forward and exerted his full strength. The huge bulk of Glavour rose in the air and pitched forward over Damis' shoulder. There was a crash as he landed on the marble floor. Quick as a cat, Damis sprang on him and pinioned down his arms.

"Take his weapons, Lura!" he cried.

Lura bent over the prostrate form of the Jovian to take from his belt the tubes which he habitually carried there. As she stooped, Glavour raised one of his huge feet and struck her with all the force of his mighty thighs behind the blow. With a cry of pain, Lura flew halfway across the room. Damis leaped to her assistance, forgetting for a moment the potentialities for destruction which the Viceroy bore on his person. A sudden sound made him whirl about. He bent over Lura and picked her from the floor. With her in his arms he leaped to one side just as a flash of violet light stabbed through the air. It missed them by inches. He dropped Lura on a rug and turned to face Glavour.

On the Jovian's face was an expression of fiendish triumph. In his hand was a short black tube which he aimed with deliberate slowness at the crouching Nepthalim. Damis shifted his gaze from the Viceroy's eyes and concentrated it on the muscles of his wrist. Glavour's grip tightened and Damis leaped to one side as the violet light again stabbed the air. With an oath, Glavour swung the

deadly ray in an arc trying to reach the Nepthalim, but Damis moved like a cat. Once, as the ray almost touched him, he sprang high in the air and let it sweep by under him. With each movement he came nearer to the Viceroy. Slowly the violet began to lose its intensity of color. Glavour dropped it and reached for a second tube. Before he could draw one, Damis was on him.

CHAPTER VII

The Deluge

Few of the Sons of God and none of the Nepthalim, save Damis, could match the brute strength of the Viceroy. As Damis rushed, Glavour sidestepped and caught the Nepthalim's arm in a bone-crushing grasp. Damis made no effort to break the grip, but with his free hand he gripped the wrist of Glavour's crippled arm. With a quick effort he twisted it and the Viceroy gave a shriek of pain as the newly knit bone gave way and his arm fell, dangling and useless. Damis caught his sound arm in a powerful grip and twisted slowly on his wrist. Gradually Glavour's fingers relaxed and Damis' arm was free. His hands shot up and gripped Glavour about the throat just in time to shut off the cry for help which was forming on his thick lips. The two giants strove silently for mastery in the struggle which meant life for the victor and death for the vanquished. The expression in Damis' eyes was one of confident mastery, but the face of the Jovian showed something that was strangely akin to fear. Even when he was whole, Glavour had found that his strength was no match for the power that lay in Damis' graceful limbs. With one of the Viceroy's arms useless, the issue was a foregone conclusion.

Glavour's face gradually grew purple and his eyes started out of their sockets. His tongue protruded horribly from his opened jaws. He grew weaker until it was only Damis' grip which kept him from falling to the ground. Then Damis broke his silence and spoke slowly and distinctly into the dying Viceroy's ears.

"I was loyal to you, Glavour," he said, "despite your brutality and sensuality which sickened me, until you strove to add to your already crowded seraglio the maiden whom I had chosen. As a Nepthalim, you thought I had no right which you need respect and I would tamely submit to whatever you chose to do. You forgot that in my veins run the best blood of Earth and the proudest blood of Jupiter. Hortan was a Mildash of Jupiter, a rank to which you could never aspire. I restricted your efforts and proved to you a thing which I long have known, that, man to man, I am your superior.

"Even then you might have won back my loyalty had I not learned how my father and my mother came to their death. It has always been given out that they went to Jupiter on a summons from Tubain, but I know the truth. They died under the knife of a cowardly assassin, under your knife, Glavour. Then it was that I swore that it would be my hand that would strike you down. When you raised your hand against me, you were Viceroy of the Earth and your power was secure, for the conspiracy against you

had no hope of success. What is the situation now? You are beleaguered in your palace, holding only the ground your few feeble weapons cover. Even this ground you hold only on the sufferance of the Earthmen. Listen to what I say, for I wish your last moments to be bitter ones. On the hill east of the city sit two weapons of a type and a power unknown to both Earth and Jupiter. They are the deadly black ray weapons of Mars. Ah, you tremble! You have good cause. One of them is trained on this palace while the other searches the heavens, ready to blast into powder the fleet of Tubain when it appears. And who, think you, brought this about, Glavour? It was I, Damis, the Nepthalim, the 'half-breed bastard' whom you despised. My only regret is that I cannot send you to the twilight of the gods as you sent that other arch-traitor, Havenner. Are your last moments pleasant, Glavour? I am increasing the pressure slowly so that you will have time to think, to think of the Earthmen you have given to sacrifice and torture, to think of your ruler, Hortan, dying under your knife, to think of the doom which is about to overcome your race. Think, Glavour, for your time for thought is short."

As he finished, Damis thrust back on the Viceroy's chin with a sudden effort. There was a dull crack as Glavour's neck broke and Damis gently lowered the inert bulk to the floor. He felt a touch on his arm as he straightened up. He whirled like a cat and Lura shrank back with a frightened gesture. Damis opened his arms and in an instant the Earth-girl was folded in them.

"Is my father safe?" was her first question.

"Safer by far than we are," exclaimed Damis with a sudden pang of anxiety. He glanced at the time-recording device on the wall. Three-quarters of an hour had passed since he had first entered the Viceregal palace. If the estimates of Tubain's arrival which he had heard were correct, the Jovian fleet should be almost most overhead. "Come," he cried to Lura, "we have no time to lose if we escape before the palace and all in it are destroyed. Where did Havenner land his ship?"

"In the yard west of the palace," she replied.

"Pray that it is still there," said Damis. "We can reach it through the path by which I entered this room. Come quickly."

With Lura at his heels, he passed through the rent in the tapestry and entered the secret passage through the walls. The way twisted and turned interminably, but finally he paused before a door. Before opening it he slid back a panel which opened a peep-hole and looked out.

"The ship is there," he whispered in a voice of relief. "There is only one guard over it that I can see. Why didn't I think to bring Glavour's weapons? I'll have to try to catch him by surprise. When I open the door, run straight for the space ship as though you were trying to escape from me. Don't try to dodge the guard, keep right on for the ship. As soon as I overpower the guard, get in the ship and hold your hand on

the starting lever. When I get on board, throw in the power at a low rate. We don't want to rise rapidly enough to get out of easy control. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Damis," she whispered.

He watched until a sudden shout drew the attention of the sentry momentarily away from the ship he was guarding. A confused sound of cheering came from the palace and the sentry looked toward the western heavens. A moment of gazing and he raised his voice in a raucous shout of joy. Instantly Damis swung open the door.

Lura sped out like a frightened deer with Damis in close pursuit. The attention of the sentry was fixed on some distant object in the sky and he did not see the oncoming pair until Lura was only a few yards from him. The sound of her footsteps attracted his attention and he glanced down at her. An expression of surprise came over his heavy features and he reached for a weapon. His gesture was never finished, for Damis' fist caught him under the ear and he dropped in his tracks. Damis looked in the direction in which the sentry had been staring and a cry broke from his lips.

"The fleet of Tubain!" he cried.

A thousand yards in the air and a scant five miles to the west was a clump of half a dozen Jovian space flyers. Massed behind them were a hundred more. They were approaching with tremendous velocity.

Damis gave a mighty bound and leaped through the airlock of the ship. Hardly had he cleared the door than Lura pulled down the starting lever. The ship flew up from the ground. Hardly had it left its ways than a momentary flash came from the hill east of the palace. The air grew black around them and a cold as of interstellar space penetrated their very bones. In an instant the ship had flashed up into the sun above the zone of influence of the Martian weapon. The shouting from the palace was suddenly stilled. Damis looked down, but nothing could be seen save a pall of intense blackness over the ground where the building stood.

"The port motor, Lura!" cried Damis. The Jovian fleet was approaching so rapidly that a collision with the nearest flyer seemed inevitable. There was a roar from the air as Lura threw in the port blast with its maximum power. Damis was hurled against the side of the ship.

From the hill where the Martian weapons had been placed came a second flash of light and a beam of jetty blackness shot through the air. An edge of it brushed the ship for an instant and Lura stiffened. A terrible cold bit through the flyer and the side where the Martian ray had touched crumpled into powder. The ship sped on, and the friction of the air and the bright rays of the sun dissipated the extreme cold. Through the terrific storm which was raging, the black ray stabbed again and again. Back and forth it played and ship after ship of the Jovians was momentarily caught in the beam. When the beam passed on there was nothing left of the ship save a cloud of dust which the terrific wind dissipated in all direc-

tions.

Damis glanced at the Earth below him. It seemed to be flying past the ship at a velocity which he could hardly comprehend. He made his way against the pressure of the movement to the control levers and strove to check the speed. As the Earth ceased to revolve beneath them, the wind rose to a terrible force.

"What has happened, Damis?" shrieked Lura in his ear.

"I don't know," he shouted in reply. "I am trying to keep away from the neighborhood of the palace for a while until the Jovian fleet is destroyed. Toness and your father might not be able to tell us from one of Tubain's ships and they might turn the ray on us."

He bent over the control levers of the ship, but they refused to obey his touch. The stern motor still roared with enough force to keep them three thousand feet above the ground, but none of the side motors responded to the controls. The ship was helpless and was tossed about, a plaything of the terrific wind which howled through the heavens. Damis watched the ground below them.

"Look, Lura!" he cried.

They swept over the site of the palace. The black ray was no longer playing on it, but the whole palace glistened like crystal.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Frost!" he shouted. "The Martian weapon did its work well. Everything in that palace is frozen. In the name of Tubain!"

The Jovian ejaculation had burst from his lips, unbidden, at the sight which met his gaze. Racing over the land was a solid wall of water, hundreds of feet high and moving with enormous speed. On toward the palace it swept. Below they could see the Earthmen on the hill striving to fly, but there was no place of safety. The oncoming wall of water was higher by a hundred feet than the top of the hill and it was the highest bit of land for many miles.

Nearer and nearer came the water until with a roar and a crash which they could plainly hear in the crippled space ship, it swept over the hill and the palace, burying them under a hundred feet of brine.

"Father!" cried Lura in anguish.

Damis made his way across the ship and folded her in his arms.

"He was chosen as one of the lives needed to buy the freedom of the Earth," he murmured to her. "It is hard, for I loved him as a father; but it was the end which he would have chosen. He died at the head of his followers battling for freedom."

"What happened, Damis?" asked Lura an hour later as she looked down on the seething tumult of water under them.

"As nearly as I can figure out, the Jovian fleet approached the palace from the west at a low elevation. In order to destroy them, we could not use the Martian weapon normal to the Earth's surface as they commanded us, but were forced to use it tangentially. The enormous counter reaction to the stream of force of almost incredible intensity

which was shot at Tubain's flyers, had to be absorbed in some way. The weapon could not take it up as it was anchored to the center of gravity of the earth. As a result, the force was translated into one of increased rotation. The Earth must be spinning on its axis at fully twice its former rate. Both the air and the water had too much inertia to follow the accelerated motion of the land, so the wind blew a gale and the oceans left their beds and swept over the land. Everything must have been swept to destruction before this flood."

"And all our labor and sacrifice has been useless," cried Lura. "We have freed a world at the cost of the lives of its inhabitants."

"The world is not lost, sweetheart," he cried as he clasped her to him. "The floods will not have overwhelmed the mountains and some men and animals will have escaped. The waters will subside in a few weeks as they take up the new rotation of the Earth. By His will, we are spared for the labor of building a new world. As soon as the land again appears above the waters, we will land and assemble those who have been spared. The fleet of Jupiter has been destroyed and we need fear no fresh attack for ages, perhaps never. Unhampered, we will build a new world and try to avoid the mistakes of the old one.

"Look, Damis!" exclaimed Lura in a hushed tone.

From the spray and mist below them leaped a living bridge of colored light. Above the sun it arced its way into the heavens in the direction in which they knew Mars lay.

"It is His promise," whispered Damis reverently, "that henceforth the planets will live in peace and amity and that nevermore will the Jovians be allowed to invade us."

Blood of the Gods

CHAPTER I.

A Shot Through the Window

It was the wolfish snarl on Hawkston's thin lips, the red glare in his eyes, which first roused terrified suspicion in the Arab's mind, there in the deserted hut on the outskirts of the little town of Azem. Suspicion became certainty as he stared at the three dark, lowering faces of the other white men, bent toward him, and all beastly with the same cruel greed that twisted their leader's features.

The brandy glass slipped from the Arab's hand and his swarthy skin went ashy.

"Lah!" he cried desperately. "No! You lied to me! You are not friends—you brought me here to murder me!"

He made a convulsive effort to rise, but Hawkston grasped the bosom of his gumbaz in an iron grip and forced him down into the camp chair again. The Arab cringed away from the dark, hawk-like visage bending close to his own.

"You won't be hurt, Dirdar," rasped the Englishman. "Not if you tell us what we want to know. You heard my question. Where is Al Wazir?"

The beady eyes of the Arab glared wildly up at his captor for an instant, then Dirdar moved with all the strength and speed of his wiry body. Bracing his feet against the floor, he heaved backward suddenly, toppling the chair over and throwing himself along with it. With a rending of worn cloth the bosom of the gumbaz came away in Hawkston's hand, and Dirdar, regaining his feet like a bouncing rubber ball, dived straight at the open door, ducking beneath the pawing arm of the big Dutchman, Van Brock. But he tripped over Ortelli's extended leg and fell sprawling, rolling on his back to slash up at the Italian with the curved knife he had snatched from his girdle. Ortelli jumped back, yowling, blood spurting from his leg, but as Dirdar once more bounced to his feet, the Russian, Krakovitch, struck him heavily from behind with a pistol barrel.

As the Arab sagged to the floor, stunned, Hawkston kicked the knife out of his hand. The Englishman stooped, grabbed him by the collar of his abba, and grunted: "Help me lift him, Van Brock."

The burly Dutchman complied, and the half-senseless Arab was slammed down in the chair from which he had just escaped. They did not tie him, but Krakovitch stood behind him, one set of steely fingers digging into his shoulder, the other poising the long gun-barrel.

Hawkston poured out a glass of brandy and thrust it to his lips. Dirdar gulped mechanically, and the glassiness faded out of his eyes.

"He's coming around," grunted Hawkston. "You hit him hard, Krakovitch. Shut up, Ortelli! Tie a rag about your bally leg and quit grousing about it! Well, Dirdar, are you ready to talk?"

The Arab looked about like a trapped animal, his lean chest heaving under the torn gumbaz. He saw no mercy in the flinty faces about him.

"Let's burn his cursed feet," snarled Ortelli, busy with an improvised bandage. "Let me put the hot irons to the swine—"

Dirdar shuddered and his gaze sought the face of the Englishman, with burning intensity. He knew that Hawkston was leader of these lawless men by virtue of sharp wits and a sledge-like fist.

The Arab licked his lips.

"As Allah is my witness, I do not know where Al Wazir is!"

"You lie!" snapped the Englishman. "We know that you were one of the party that took him into the desert—and he never came back. We know you know where he was left. Now, are you going to tell?"

"El Borak will kill me!" muttered Dirdar.

"Who's El Borak?" rumbled Van Brock.

"American," snapped Hawkston. "Adventurer. Real name's Gordon. He led the caravan that took Al Wazir into the desert. Dirdar, you needn't fear El Borak. We'll protect you from him."

A new gleam entered the Arab's shifty eyes; avarice mingled with the fear already there. Those beady eyes grew cunning and cruel.

"There is only one reason why you wish to find Al Wazir," he said. "You hope to learn the secret of a treasure richer than the secret hoard of Shahrazar the Forbidden! Well, suppose I tell you? Suppose I even guide you to the spot where Al Wazir is to be found—will you protect me from El Borak—will you give me a share of the Blood of the Gods?"

Hawkston frowned, and Ortelli ripped out an oath.

"Promise the dog nothing! Burn the soles off his feet! Here! I'll heat the irons!"

"Let that alone!" said Hawkston with an oath. "One of you better go to the door and watch. I saw that old devil Salim sneaking around through the alleys just before sundown."

No one obeyed. They did not trust their leader. He did not repeat the command. He turned to Dirdar, in whose eyes greed was much stronger now than fear.

"How do I know you'd guide us right? Every man in that caravan swore an oath he'd never betray Al Wazir's hiding place."

"Oaths were made to be broken," answered Dirdar cynically. "For a share in the Blood of the Gods I would foreswear Muhammad. But even when you have found Al Wazir, you may not be able to learn the secret of the treasure."

"We have ways of making men talk," Hawkston assured him grimly. "Will you put our skill to the test, or will you guide us to Al Wazir? We will give you a share of the treasure." Hawkston had no intention of keeping his word as he spoke.

"Mashallah!" said the Arab. "He dwells alone in an all but inaccessible place. When I name it, you, at least, Hawkston effendi, will know how to reach it. But I can guide you by a shorter way, which will save two days. And a day saved on the desert is often the difference between life and death.

"Al Wazir dwells in the caves of El

Khour—arrrgh!" His voice broke in a scream, and he threw up his hands, a sudden image of frantic terror, eyes glaring, teeth bared. Simultaneously the deafening report of a shot filled the hut, and Dirdar toppled from his chair, clutching at his breast. Hawkston whirled, caught a glimpse through the window of a smoking black pistol barrel and a grim bearded face. He fired at that face even as, with his left hand, he swept the candle from the table and plunged the hut into darkness.

His companions were cursing, yelling, falling over each other, but Hawkston acted with unerring decision. He plunged to the door of the hut, knocking aside somebody who stumbled into his path, and threw the door open. He saw a figure running across the road, into the shadows on the side. He threw up his revolver, fired, and saw the figure sway and fall headlong, to be swallowed up by the darkness under the trees. He crouched for an instant in the doorway, gun lifted, left arm barring the blundering rush of the other men.

"Keep back, curse you! That was old Salim. There may be more, under the trees across the road."

But no menacing figure appeared, no sound mingled with the rustling of the palm-leaves in the wind, except a noise that might have been a man flopping in his death-throes—or dragging himself painfully away on hands and knees. This noise quickly ceased and Hawkston stepped cautiously out into the starlight. No shot greeted his appearance, and instantly he became a dynamo of energy. He leaped back into the hut, snarling: "Van Brock, take Ortelli and look for Salim. I know I hit him. You'll probably find him lying dead over there under the trees. If he's still breathing, finish him! He was Al Wazir's steward. We don't want him taking tales to Gordon."

Followed by Krakovitch, the Englishman groped his way into the darkened hut, struck a light and held it over the prostrate figure on the floor; it etched a grey face, staring glassy eyes, and a naked breast in which showed a round blue hole from which the blood had already ceased to ooze.

"Shot through the heart!" swore Hawkston, clenching his fist. "Old Salim must have seen him with us, and trailed him, guessing what we were after. The old devil shot him to keep him from guiding us to Al Wazir—but no matter. I don't need any guide to get me to the caves of El Khour—well?" As the Dutchman and the Italian entered.

Van Brock spoke: "We didn't find the old dog. Smears of blood all over the grass, though. He must have been hard hit."

"Let him go," snarled Hawkston. "He's crawled away to die somewhere. It's a mile to the nearest occupied house. He won't live to get that far. Come on! The camels and the men are ready. They're behind that palm grove south of this hut. Everything's ready for the jump, just as I planned it. Let's go!"

Soon thereafter there sounded the soft pad of camel's hoofs and the jingle of accoutrements, as a line of mounted figures, ghostly in the night, moved

westward into the desert. Behind them the flat roofs of el-Azem slept in the starlight, shadowed by the palm-leaves which stirred in the breeze that blew from the Persian Gulf.

CHAPTER II.

The Abodes of Emptiness

Gordon's thumb was hooked easily in his belt, keeping his hand near the butt of his heavy pistol, as he rode leisurely through the starlight, and his gaze swept the palms which lined each side of the road, their broad fronds rattling in the faint breeze. He did not expect an ambush or the appearance of an enemy. He had no blood-feud with any man in el-Azem. And yonder, a hundred yards ahead of him, stood the flat-roofed, wall-encircled house of his friend, Achmet ibn Mitkhal, where the American was living as an honored guest. But the habits of a lifetime are tenacious. For years El Borak had carried his life in his hands, and if there were hundreds of men in Arabia proud to call him friend, there were hundreds of others who would have given the teeth out of their heads for a clean sight of him, etched against the stars, over the barrel of a rifle.

Gordon reached the gate, and was about to call to the gate-keeper, when it swung open, and the portly figure of his host emerged.

"Allah be with thee, El Borak! I was beginning to fear some enemy had laid an ambush for you. Is it wise to ride alone, by night, when within a three days' ride dwell men who bear blood-feud with you?"

Gordon swung down, and handed his reins to a groom who had followed his master out of the compound. The American was not a large man, but he was square-shouldered and deep-chested, with corded sinews and steely nerves which had been tempered and honed by the tooth-and-nail struggle for survival in the wild outlands of the world. His black eyes gleamed in the starlight like those of some untamed son of the wilderness.

"I think my enemies have decided to let me die of old age or inertia," he replied. "There has not been—"

"What's that?" Achmet ibn Mitkhal had his own enemies. In an instant the curious dragging, choking sounds he had heard beyond the nearest angle of the wall had transformed him into a tense image of suspicion and menace.

Gordon had heard the sounds as quickly as his Arab host, and he turned with the smooth speed of a cat, the big pistol appearing in his right hand as if by magic. He took a single quick stride toward the angle of the wall—then around that angle came a strange figure, with torn, trailing garments. A man, crawling slowly and painfully along on his hands and knees. As he crawled he gasped and panted with a grisly whistling and gagging in his breathing. As they stared at him, he slumped down almost at their feet, turning a blood-streaked visage to the starlight.

"Salim!" ejaculated Gordon softly, and with one stride he was at the angle, staring around it, pistol poised. No living thing met his eye; only an expanse

of bare ground, barred by the shadows of the palms. He turned back to the prostrate man, over whom Achmet was already bending.

"Effendi!" panted the old man. "El Borak!" Gordon dropped to his knee beside him, and Salim's bony fingers clenched desperately on his arm.

"A hakim, quick, Achmet!" snapped Gordon.

"Nay," gasped Salim. "I am dying—"

"Who shot you, Salim?" asked Gordon, for he had already ascertained the nature of the wound which dyed the old man's tattered abba with crimson.

"Hawkston—the Englishman." The words came with an effort. "I saw him—the three rogues who follow him—beguiling that fool Dirdar to the

deserted hut near Mekmet's P ool. I followed for I knew—they meant no good. Dirdar was a dog. He drank liquor-like an Infidel. El Borak! He betrayed Al Wazir! In spite of his oath. I shot him—through the window— but not in time. He will never guide them—but he told Hawkston—of the caves of El Khour. I saw their caravan—camels—seven Arab servants. El Borak! They have departed—for the caves—the caves of El Khour!"

"Don't worry about them, Salim," replied Gordon, responding to the urgent appeal in the glazing eyes. "They'll never lay hand on Al Wazir. I promise you."

"Al Hamud Lillah—" whispered the old Arab, and with a spasm that brought frothy blood to his bearded lips, his grim old face set in iron lines, and he was dead before Gordon could ease his head to the ground.

The American stood up and looked down at the silent figure. Achmet came close to him and tugged his sleeve.

"Al Wazir!" murmured Achmet. "Wallah! I thought men had forgotten all about that man. It is more than a year now since he disappeared."

"White men don't forget—not when there's loot in the offing," answered Gordon sardonically. "All up and down the coast men are still looking for the Blood of the Gods—those marvelous matched rubies which were Al Wazir's especial pride, and which disappeared when he forsook the world and went into the desert to live as a hermit, seeking the Way to Truth through meditation and self-denial."

Achmet shivered and glanced westward where, beyond the belt of palms, the shadowy desert stretched vast and mysterious to mingle its immensity with the dimness of the starlit night.

"A hard way to seek Truth," said Achmet, who was a lover of the soft things and the rich things of life.

"Al Wazir was a strange man," answered Gordon. "But his servants loved him. Old Salim there, for instance. Good God, Mekmet's Pool is more than a mile from here. Salim crawled—crawled all that way, shot through and through. He knew Hawkston would torture Al Wazir—maybe kill him. Achmet, have my racing camel saddled—"

"I'll go with you!" exclaimed Achmet. "How many men will we need? You heard Salim—Hawkston will have at

least eleven men with him—"

"We couldn't catch him now," answered Gordon. "He's got too much of a start on us. His camels are hejin—racing camels—too. I'm going to the caves of El Khour, alone."

"But—"

"They'll go by the caravan road that leads to Riyadh; I'm going by the Well of Amir Khan."

Achmet blenched.

"Amir Khan lies within the country of Shalan ibn Mansour, who hates you as an imam hates Shaitan the Damned!"

"Perhaps none of his tribe will be at the Well," answered Gordon. "I'm the only Feringhi who knows of that route. If Dirdar told Hawkston about it, the Englishman couldn't find it, without a guide. I can get to the caves a full day ahead of Hawkston. I'm going alone, because we couldn't take enough men to whip the Ruweila if they're on the warpath. One man has a better chance of slipping through than a score. I'm not going to fight Hawkston—not now. I'm going to warn Al Wazir. We'll hide until Hawkston gives it up and comes back to el-Azem. Then, when he's gone, I'll return by the caravan road."

Achmet shouted an order to the men who were gathering just within the gate, and they scampered to do his bidding.

"You will go disguised, at least?" he urged.

"No. It wouldn't do any good. Until I get into Ruweila country I won't be in any danger, and after that a disguise would be useless. The Ruweila kill and plunder every stranger they catch, whether Christian or Muhammadan."

He strode into the compound to oversee the saddling of the white racing camel.

"I'm riding light as possible," he said. "Speed means everything. The camel won't need any water until we reach the Well. After that it's not a long jump to the caves. Load on just enough food and water to last me to the Well, with economy."

His economy was that of a true son of the desert. Neither water-skin nor food-bag was over-heavy when the two were slung on the high rear pommel. With a brief word of farewell, Gordon swung into the saddle, and at the tap of his bamboo stick, the beast lurched to its feet. "Yahh!" Another tap and it swung into motion. Men pulled wide the compound gate and stood aside, their eyes gleaming in the torchlight.

"Bismillah el rahman el rahhim!" quoth Achmet resignedly, lifting his hands in a gesture of benediction, as the camel and its rider faded into the night.

"He rides to death," muttered a bearded Arab.

"Were it another man I should agree," said Achmet. "But it is El Borak who rides. Yet Shalan ibn Mansour would give many horses for his head."

The sun was swinging low over the desert, a tawny stretch of rocky soil and sand as far as Gordon could see in every direction. The solitary rider was the only visible sign of life, but Gordon's vigilance was keen. Days and nights of hard riding lay behind him; he was coming into the Ruweila country, now, and

every step he took increased his danger by that much. The Ruweila, whom he believed to be kin to the powerful Roualla of El Hamad, were true sons of Ishmael—hawks of the desert, whose hands were against every man not of their clan. To avoid their country the regular caravan road to the west swung wide to the south. This was an easy route, with wells a day's march apart, and it passed within a day's ride of the caves of El Khour, the catacombs which pit a low range of hills rising sheer out of the wastelands.

Few white men know of their existence, but evidently Hawkston knew of the ancient trail that turned northward from the Well of Khosru, on the caravan road. Hawkston was perforce approaching El Khour circuitously. Gordon was heading straight westward, across waterless wastes, cut by a trace so faint only an Arab or El Borak could have followed it. On that route there was but one watering place between the fringe of oases along the coast and the caves—the half-mythical Well of Amir Khan, the existence of which was a secret jealously guarded by the Bedouins.

There was no fixed habitation at the oasis, which was but a clump of palms, watered by a small spring, but frequently bands of Ruweila camped there. That was a chance he must take. He hoped they were driving their camel herds somewhere far to the north, in the heart of their country; but like true hawks, they ranged far afield, striking at the caravans and the outlying villages.

The trail he was following was so slight that few would have recognized it as such. It stretched dimly away before him over a level expanse of stone-littered ground, broken on one hand by sand dunes, on the other by a succession of low ridges. He glanced at the sun, and tapped the water-bag that swung from the saddle. There was little left, though he had practiced the grim economy of a Bedouin or a wolf. But within a few hours he would be at the Well of Amir Khan, where he would replenish his supply—though his nerves tightened at the thought of what might be waiting there for him.

Even as the thought passed through his mind, the sun struck a glint from something on the nearer of the sand dunes. The quick duck of his head was instinctive, and simultaneously there rang out the crack of a rifle and he heard the thud of the bullet into flesh. The camel leaped convulsively and came down in a headlong sprawl, shot through the heart. Gordon leaped free as it fell, rifle in hand, and in an instant was crouching behind the carcass, watching the crest of the dune over the barrel of his rifle. A strident yell greeted the fall of the camel, and another shot set the echoes barking. The bullet ploughed into the ground beside Gordon's stiffening breastwork, and the American replied. Dust spurted into the air so near the muzzle that gleamed on the crest that it evoked a volley of lurid oaths in a choked voice.

The black glittering ring was withdrawn, and presently there rose the rapid drum of hoofs. Gordon saw a white kafieh bobbing among the dunes, and

understood the Bedouin's plan. He believed there was only one man. That man intended to circle Gordon's position, cross the trail a few hundred yards west of him, and get on the rising ground behind the American, where his vantage-point would allow him to shoot over the bulk of the camel—for of course he knew Gordon would keep the dead beast between them. But Gordon shifted himself only enough to command the trail ahead of him, the open space the Arab must cross after leaving the dunes before he reached the protection of the ridges. Gordon rested his rifle across the stiff forelegs of the camel.

A quarter of a mile up the trail there was a sandstone rock jutting up in the skyline. Anyone crossing the trail between it and himself would be limned against it momentarily. He set his sights and drew a bead against that rock. He was betting that the Bedouin was alone, and that he would not withdraw to any great distance before making the dash across the trail.

Even as he meditated a white-clad figure burst from among the ridges and raced across the trail, bending low in the saddle and flogging his mount. It was a long shot, but Gordon's nerves did not quiver. At the exact instant that the white-clad figure was limned against the distant rock, the American pulled the trigger. For a fleeting moment he thought he had missed; then the rider straightened convulsively, threw up two wide-sleeved arms and reeled back drunkenly. The frightened horse reared high, throwing the man heavily. In an instant the landscape showed two separate shapes where there had been one—a bundle of white sprawling on the ground, and a horse racing off southward.

Gordon lay motionless for a few minutes, too wary to expose himself. He knew the man was dead; the fall alone would have killed him. But there was a slight chance that other riders might be lurking among the sand dunes, after all.

The sun beat down savagely; vultures appeared from nowhere— black dots in the sky, swinging in great circles, lower and lower. There was no hint of movement among the ridges or the dunes.

Gordon rose and glanced down at the dead camel. His jaws set a trifle more grimly; that was all. But he realized what the killing of his steed meant. He looked westward, where the heat waves shimmered. It would be a long walk, a long, dry walk, before it ended.

Stooping, he unslung water-skin and food-bag and threw them over his shoulders. Rifle in hand he went up the trail with a steady, swinging stride that would eat up the miles and carry him for hour after hour without faltering.

When he came to the shape sprawling in the path, he set the butt of his rifle on the ground and stood looking briefly, one hand steadying the bags on his shoulders. The man he had killed was a Ruweila, right enough: one of the tall, sinewy, hawk-faced and wolf-hearted plunderers of the southern desert. Gordon's bullet had caught him just below the arm-pit. That the man had been alone, and on a horse instead of a camel,

meant that there was a larger party of his tribesmen somewhere in the vicinity. Gordon shrugged his shoulders, shifted the rifle to the crook of his arm, and moved on up the trail. The score between himself and the men of Shalan ibn Mansour was red enough, already. It might well be settled once and for all at the Well of Amir Khan.

As he swung along the trail he kept thinking of the man he was going to warn: Al Wazir, the Arabs called him, because of his former capacity with the Sultan of Oman. A Russian nobleman, in reality, wandering over the world in search of some mystical goal Gordon had never understood, just as an unquenchable thirst for adventure drove El Borak around the planet in constant wanderings. But the dreamy soul of the Slav coveted something more than material things. Al Wazir had been many things. Wealth, power, position; all had slipped through his unsatisfied fingers. He had delved deep in strange religions and philosophies, seeking the answer to the riddle of Existence, as Gordon sought the stimulation of hazard. The mysticisms of the Sufia had attracted him, and finally the ascetic mysteries of the Hindus.

A year before Al Wazir had been governor of Oman, next to the Sultan the wealthiest and most powerful man on the Pearl Coast. Without warning he had given up his position and disappeared. Only a chosen few knew that he had distributed his vast wealth among the poor, renounced all ambition and power, and gone like an ancient prophet to dwell in the desert, where, in the solitary meditation and self denial of a true ascetic, he hoped to read at last the eternal riddle of Life—as the ancient prophets read it. Gordon had accompanied him on that last journey, with the handful of faithful servants who knew their master's intentions—old Salim among them, for between the dreamy philosopher and the hard-bitten man of action there existed a powerful tie of friendship.

But for the traitor and fool, Dirdar, Al Wazir's secret had been well kept. Gordon knew that ever since Al Wazir's disappearance, adventurers of every breed had been searching for him, hoping to secure possession of the treasure that the Russian had possessed in the days of his power—the wonderful collection of perfectly matched rubies, known as the Blood of the Gods, which had blazed a lurid path through Oriental history for five hundred years. These jewels had not been distributed among the poor with the rest of Al Wazir's wealth. Gordon himself did not know what the man had done with them. Nor did the American care. Greed was not one of his faults. And Al Wazir was his friend.

The blazing sun rocked slowly down the sky, its flame turned to molten copper; it touched the desert rim, and etched against it, a crawling black tiny figure, Gordon moved grimly on, striding inexorably into the somber immensities of the Ruba al Khali—the Empty Abodes.

CHAPTER III.

The Fight at the Well of Amir Khan

Etched against a white streak of

dawn, motionless as figures on a tapestry, Gordon saw the clump of palms that marked the Well of Amir Khan grow up out of the fading night.

A few moments later he swore, softly. Luck, the fickle jade, was not with him this time. A faint ribbon of blue smoke curled up against the whitening sky. There were men at the Well of Amir Khan.

Gordon licked his dry lips. The water-bag that slapped against his back at each stride was flat, empty. The distance he would have covered in a matter of hours, skimming over the desert on the back of his tireless camel, he had trudged on foot, the whole night long, even though he had held a gait that few even of the desert's sons could have maintained unbroken. Even for him, in the coolness of the night, it had been a hard trek, though his iron muscles resisted fatigue like a wolf's.

Far to the east a low blue line lay on the horizon. It was the range of hills that held the caves of El Khour. He was still ahead of Hawkston, forging on somewhere far to the south. But the Englishman would be gaining on him at every stride. Gordon could swing wide to avoid the men at the Well, and trudge on. Trudge on, afoot, and with empty water-bag? It would be suicide. He could never reach the caves on foot and without water. Already he was bitten by the devils of thirst.

A red flame grew up in his eyes, and his dark face set in wolfish lines. Water was life in the desert; life for him and for Al Wazir. There was water at the Well, and camels. There were men, his enemies, in possession of both. If they lived, he must die. It was the law of the wolf-pack, and of the desert. He slipped the limp bags from his shoulders, cocked his rifle and went forward to kill or be killed—not for wealth, nor the love of a woman, nor an ideal, nor a dream, but for as much water as could be carried in a sheep-skin bag.

A wadi or gully broke the plain ahead of him, meandering to a point within a few hundred feet of the Well. Gordon crept toward it, taking advantage of every bit of cover. He had almost reached it, at a point a hundred yards from the Well, when a man in white kafieh and ragged abba materialized from among the palms. Discovery in the growing light was instant. The Arab yelled and fired. The bullet knocked up dust a foot from Gordon's knee, as he crouched on the edge of the gully, and he fired back. The Arab cried out, dropped his rifle and staggered drunkenly back among the palms.

The next instant Gordon had sprung down into the gully and was moving swiftly and carefully along it, toward the point where it bent nearest the Well. He glimpsed white-clad figures flitting briefly among the trees, and then rifles began to crack viciously. Bullets sang over the gully as the men fired from behind their saddles and bales of goods, piled like a rampart among the stems of the palms. They lay in the eastern fringe of the clump; the camels, Gordon knew, were on the other

side of the trees. From the volume of the firing it could not be a large party.

A rock on the edge of the gully provided cover. Gordon thrust his rifle barrel under a jutting corner of it and watched for movement among the palms. Fire spurted and a bullet whined off the rock—zingggg! Dwindling in the distance like the dry whir of a rattler. Gordon fired at the puff of smoke, and a defiant yell answered him.

His eyes were slits of black flame. A fight like this could last for days. And he could not endure a siege. He had no water; he had no time. A long march to the south the caravan of Hawkston was swinging relentlessly westward, each step carrying them nearer the caves of El Khour and the unsuspecting man who dreamed his dreams there. A few hundred feet away from Gordon there was water, and camels that would carry him swiftly to his destination; but lead-fanged wolves of the desert lay between.

Lead came at his retreat thick and fast, and vehement voices rained maledictions on him. They let him know they knew he was alone, and on foot, and probably half-mad with thirst. They howled jeers and threats. But they did not expose themselves. They were confident but wary, with the caution taught by the desert deep ingrained in them. They held the winning hand and they intended to keep it so.

An hour of this, and the sun climbing over the eastern rim, and the heat beginning—the molten, blinding heat of the southern desert. It was fierce already; later it would be a scorching hell in that unshielded gully. Gordon licked his blackened lips and staked his life and the life of Al Wazir on one desperate cast of Fate's blind dice.

Recognizing and accepting the terrible odds against success, he raised himself high enough to expose head and one shoulder above the gully rim, firing as he did so. Three rifles cracked together and lead hummed about his ears; the bullet of one raked a white-hot line across his upper arm. Instantly Gordon cried out, the loud, agonized cry of a man hard hit, and threw his arms above the rim of the gully in the convulsive gesture of a man suddenly death-stricken. One hand held the rifle and the motion threw it out of the gully, to fall ten feet away, in plain sight of the Arabs.

An instant's silence, in which Gordon crouched below the rim, then blood-thirsty yells echoed his cry. He dared not raise himself high enough to look, but he heard the slap-slap-slap of sandalled feet, winged by hate and blood-lust. They had fallen for his ruse. Why not? A crafty man might feign a wound and fall, but who would deliberately cast away his rifle? The thought of a Feringhi, lying helpless and badly wounded in the bottom of the gully, with a defenseless throat ready for the knife, was too much for the blood-lust of the Bedouins. Gordon held himself in iron control, until the swift feet were only a matter of yards away—then he came erect like a steel spring released, the big automatic in his hand.

As he leaped up he caught one split-second glimpse of three Arabs, halting dead in their tracks, wild-eyed at the unexpected apparition— even as he

straightened-his gun was roaring. One man spun on his heel and fell in a crumpled heap, shot through the head. Another fired once, with a rifle, from the hip, without aim. An instant later he was down, with a slug through his groin and another ripping through his breast as he fell. And then Fate took a hand again—Fate in the form of a grain of sand in the mechanism of Gordon's automatic. The gun jammed just as he threw it down on the remaining Arab.

This man had no gun; only a long knife. With a howl he wheeled and legged it back for the grove, his rags whipping on the wind of his haste. And Gordon was after him like a starving wolf. His strategy might go for nothing if the man got back among the trees, where he might have left a rifle.

The Bedouin ran like an antelope, but Gordon was so close behind him when they reached the trees, the Arab had no time to snatch up the rifle leaning against the improvised rampart. He wheeled at bay, yowling like a mad dog, and slashing with the long knife. The point tore Gordon's shirt as the American dodged, and brought down the heavy pistol on the Arab's head. The thick kafieh saved the man's skull from being crushed, but his knees buckled and he went down, throwing his arms about Gordon's waist and dragging down the white man as he fell. Somewhere on the other side of the grove the wounded man was calling down curses on El Borak.

The two men rolled on the ground, ripping and smiting like wild animals. Gordon struck once again with his gun barrel, a glancing blow that laid open the Arab's face from eye to jaw, and then dropped the jammed pistol and caught at the arm that wielded the knife. He got a grip with his left hand on the wrist and the guard of the knife itself, and with his other hand began to fight for a throat-hold. The Arab's ghastly, blood-smeared countenance writhed in a tortured grin of muscular strain. He knew the terrible strength that lurked in El Borak's iron fingers, knew that if they closed on his throat they would not let go until his jugular was torn out.

He threw his body frantically from side to side, wrenching and tearing. The violence of his efforts sent both men rolling over and over, to crash against palm stems and carom against saddles and bales. Once Gordon's head was driven hard against a tree, but the blow did not weaken him, nor did the vicious drive the Arab got in with a knee to his groin. The Bedouin grew frantic, maddened by the fingers that sought his throat, the dark face, inexorable as iron, that glared into his own. Somewhere on the other side of the grove a pistol was barking, but Gordon did not feel the tear of lead, nor hear the whistle of bullets.

With a shriek like a wounded panther's, the Arab whirled over again, a knot of straining muscles, and his hand, thrown out to balance himself, fell on the barrel of the pistol Gordon had dropped. Quick as a flash he lifted it, just as Gordon found the hold he had been seeking, and crashed the butt down on the American's head with every ounce of strength in his lean sinews, backed by the fear of death. A tremor ran

through the American's iron frame, and his head fell forward. And in that instant the Ruweila tore free like a wolf breaking from a trap, leaving his long knife in Gordon's hand.

Even before Gordon's brain cleared, his war-trained muscles were responding instinctively. As the Ruweila sprang up, he shook his head and rose more slowly, the long knife in his hand. The Arab hurled the pistol at him, and caught up the rifle which leaned against the barrier. He gripped it by the barrel with both hands and wheeled, whirling the stock above his head; but before the blow could fall Gordon struck with all the blinding speed that had earned him his name among the tribes. In under the descending butt he lunged and his knife, driven with all his strength and the momentum of his charge, plunged into the Arab's breast and drove him back against a tree into which the blade sank a hand's breadth deep. The Bedouin cried out, a thick, choking cry that death cut short. An instant he sagged against the haft, dead on his feet and nailed upright to the palm tree. Then his knees buckled and his weight tore the knife from the wood and he pitched into the sand.

Gordon wheeled, shaking the sweat from his eyes, glaring about for the fourth man—the wounded man. The furious fight had taken only a matter of moments. The pistol was still cracking dryly on the other side of the trees, and an animal scream of pain mingled with the reports.

With a curse Gordon caught up the Arab's rifle and burst through the grove. The wounded man lay under the shade of the trees, propped on an elbow, and aiming his pistol, not at El Borak but at the one camel that still lived. The other three lay stretched in their blood. Gordon sprang at the man, swinging the rifle stock. He was a split-second too late. The shot cracked and the camel moaned and crumpled even as the butt fell on the lifted arm, snapping the bone like a twig. The smoking pistol fell into the sand and the Arab sank back, laughing like a ghoul.

"Now see if you can escape from the Well of Amir Khan, El Borak!" he gasped. "The riders of Shalan ibn Mansour are out! Tonight or tomorrow they will return to the Well! Will you await them here, or flee on foot to die in the desert, or be tracked down like a wolf? Ya kalb! Forgotten of God! They will hang thy skin on a palmtree! Laan abuk—!"

Lifting himself with an effort that spattered his beard with bloody foam, he spat toward Gordon, laughed croakingly and fell back, dead before his head hit the ground.

Gordon stood like a statue, staring down at the dying camels. The dead man's vengeance was grimly characteristic of his race. Gordon lifted his head and looked long at the low blue range on the western horizon. Cheeringly the dying Arab had foretold the grim choice left him. He could wait at the Well until Shalan ibn Mansour's wild riders returned and wiped him out by force of numbers, or he could plunge into the desert again on foot. And whether he awaited certain doom at the Well, or sought the uncertain doom of the desert,

inexorably Hawkston would be marching westward, steadily cutting down the lead Gordon had had at the beginning.

But Gordon never had any doubt concerning his next move. He drank deep at the Well, and bolted some of the food the Arabs had been preparing for their breakfast. Some dried dates and crusted cheese-balls he placed in a food-bag, and he filled a water-skin from the Well. He retrieved his rifle, got the sand out of his automatic and buckled to his belt a scimitar from the girdle of one of the men he had killed. He had come into the desert intending to run and hide, not to fight. But it looked very much as if he would do much more fighting before this venture was over, and the added weight of the sword was more than balanced by the feeling of added security in the touch of the lean curved blade.

Then he slung the water-skin and food-bag over his shoulders, took up his rifle and strode out of the shadows of the grove into the molten heat of the desert day. He had not slept at all the night before. His short rest at the Well had put new life and spring into his resilient muscles, hardened and toughened by an incredibly strenuous life. But it was a long, long march to the caves of El Khour, under a searing sun. Unless some miracle occurred, he could not hope to reach them before Hawkston now. And before another sun-rise the riders of Shalan ibn Mansour might well be on his trail, in which case—but all he had ever asked of Fortune was a fighting chance.

The sun rocked its slow, torturing way up the sky and down; twilight deepened into dusk, and the desert stars winked out; and on, grimly on, plodded that solitary figure, pitting an indomitable will against the merciless immensity of thirst-haunted desolation.

CHAPTER IV.

The Djinn of the Caves

The caves of El Khour pit the sheer eastern walls of a gaunt hill-range that rises like a stony backbone out of a waste of rocky plains. There is only one spring in the hills; it rises in a cave high up in the wall and curls down the steep rocky slope, a slender thread of silver, to empty into a broad shallow pool below. The sun was hanging like a blood-red ball above the western desert when Francis Xavier Gordon halted near this pool and scanned the rows of gaping cave-mouths with blood-shot eyes. He licked heat-blackened lips with a tongue from which all moisture had been baked. Yet there was still a little water in the skin on his shoulder. He had economized on that gruelling march, with the savage economy of the wilderness-bred.

It seemed a bit hard to realize he had actually reached his goal. The hills of El Khour had shimmered before him for so many miles, unreal in the heat-waves, until at last they had seemed like a mirage, a fantasy of a thirst-maddened imagination. The desert sun plays tricks even with a brain like Gordon's. Slowly, slowly the hills had grown up before him— now he stood at the foot of the eastern-most cliff, frowning up at the tiers of caves which showed their black mouths in even rows.

Nightfall had not brought Shalan ibn Mansour's riders swooping after the solitary wanderer, nor had dawn brought them. Again and again through the long, hot day, Gordon had halted on some rise and looked back, expecting to see the dust of the hurrying camels; but the desert had stretched empty to the horizon.

And now it seemed another miracle had taken place, for there were no signs of Hawkston and his caravan. Had they come and gone? They would have at least watered their camels at the pool; and from the utter lack of signs about it, Gordon knew that no one had camped or watered animals at the pool for many moons. No, it was indisputable, even if unexplainable. Something had delayed Hawkston and Gordon had reached the caves ahead of him after all.

The American dropped on his belly at the pool and sank his face into the cool water. He lifted his head presently, shook it like a lion shaking his mane, and leisurely washed the dust from his face and hands.

Then he rose and went toward the cliff. He had seen no sign of life, yet he knew that in one of those caves lived the man he had come to seek. He lifted his voice in a far-carrying shout.

"Al Wazir! Ho there, Al Wazir!"

"Wazirrr!" whispered the echo back from the cliff. There was no other answer. The silence was ominous. With his rifle at the ready Gordon went toward the narrow trail that wound up the rugged face of the cliff. Up this he climbed, keenly scanning the eaves. They pitted the whole wall, in even tiers—too even to be the chance work of nature. They were man-made. Thousands of years ago, in the dim dawn of prehistory they had served as dwelling-places for some race of people who were not mere savages, who nitched their caverns in the soft strata with skill and cunning. Gordon knew the caves were connected by narrow passages, and that only by this ladder-like path he was following could they be reached from below.

The path ended at a long ledge, upon which all the caves of the lower tier opened. In the largest of these Al Wazir had taken up his abode.

Gordon called again, without result. He strode into the cave, and there he halted. It was square in shape. In the back wall and in each side wall showed a narrow door-like opening. Those at the sides led into adjoining caves. That at the back let into a smaller cavern, without any other outlet. There, Gordon remembered, Al Wazir had stored the dried and tinned foods he had brought with him. He had brought no furniture, nor weapons.

In one corner of the square cave a heap of charred fragments indicated that a fire had once been built there. In one corner lay a heap of skins—Al Wazir's bed. Nearby lay the one book Al Wazir had brought with him—The Bhagavat-Gita. But of the man himself there was no evidence.

Gordon went into the storeroom, struck a match and looked about him. The tins of food were there, though the supply was considerably depleted. But

they were not stacked against the wall in neat columns as Gordon had seen them stowed under Al Wazir's directions. They were tumbled and scattered about all over the floor, with open and empty tins among them. This was not like Al Wazir, who placed a high value on neatness and order, even in small things. The rope he had brought along to aid him in exploring the caves lay coiled in one corner.

Gordon, extremely puzzled, returned to the square cave. Here, he had fully expected to find Al Wazir sitting in tranquil meditation, or out on the ledge meditating over the sun-set desert. Where was the man?

He was certain that Al Wazir had not wandered away to perish in the desert. There was no reason for him to leave the caves. If he had simply tired of his lonely life and taken his departure, he would have taken the book that was lying on the floor, his inseparable companion. There was no blood-stain on the floor, or anything to indicate that the hermit had met a violent end. Nor did Gordon believe that any Arab, even the Ruweila, would molest the "holy man." Anyway, if Arabs had done away with Al Wazir, they would have taken away the rope and the tins of food. And he was certain that, until Hawkston learned of it, no white man but himself had known of Al Wazir's whereabouts.

He searched through the lower tiers of caves without avail. The sun had sunk out of sight behind the hills, whose long shadows streamed far eastward across the desert, and deepening shadows filled the caverns. The silence and the mystery began to weigh on Gordon's nerves. He began to be irked by the feeling that unseen eyes were watching him. Men who live lives of constant peril develop certain obscure faculties or instincts to a keenness unknown to those lapped about by the securities of "civilization." As he passed through the caves, Gordon repeatedly felt an impulse to turn suddenly, to try to surprise those eyes that seemed to be boring into his back. At last he did wheel suddenly, thumb pressing back the hammer of his rifle, eyes alert for any movement in the growing dusk. The shadowy chambers and passages stood empty before him.

Once, as he passed a dark passageway he could have sworn he heard a soft noise, like the stealthy tread of a bare, furtive foot. He stepped to the mouth of the tunnel and called, without conviction: "Is that you, Ivan?" He shivered at the silence which followed; he had not really believed it was Al Wazir. He groped his way into the tunnel, rifle poked ahead of him. Within a few yards he encountered a blank wall; there seemed to be no entrance or exit except the doorway through which he had come. And the tunnel was empty, save for himself.

He returned to the ledge before the caves, in disgust.

"Hell, am I getting jumpy?"

But a grisly thought kept recurring to him—recollection of the Bedouins' belief that a supernatural fiend lurked in these ancient caves and devoured any human foolish enough to be caught there by night. This thought kept recur-

ring, together with the reflection that the Orient held many secrets, which the West would laugh at, but which often proved to be grim realities. That would explain Al Wazir's mysterious absence: if some fiendish or bestial dweller in the caves had devoured him—Gordon's speculations revolved about a hypothetical rock-python of enormous size, dwelling for generations, perhaps centuries, in the hills—that would explain the lack of any blood-stains. Abruptly he swore: "Damn! I'm going batty. There are no snakes like that in Arabia. These caves are getting on my nerves."

It was a fact. There was a brooding weirdness about these ancient and forgotten caverns that roused uncanny speculations in Gordon's predominantly Celtic mind. What race had occupied them, so long ago? What wars had they witnessed, against what fierce barbarians sweeping up from the south? What cruelties and intrigues had they known, what grim rituals of worship and human sacrifice? Gordon shrugged his shoulders, wishing he had not thought of human sacrifice. The idea fitted too well with the general atmosphere of these grim caverns.

Angry at himself, he returned to the big square cavern, which, he remembered, the Arabs called Niss'rosh, The Eagle's Nest, for some reason or other. He meant to sleep in the caves that night, partly to overcome the aversion he felt toward them, partly because he did not care to be caught down on the plain in case Hawkston or Shalan ibn Mansour arrived in the night. There was another mystery. Why had not they reached the caves, one or both of them? The desert was a breeding-place of mysteries, a twilight realm of fantasy. Al Wazir, Hawkston and Shalan ibn Mansour—had the fabled djinn of the Empty Abodes snatched them up and flown away with them, leaving him the one man alive in all the vast desert? Such whims of imagination played through his exhausted brain, as, too weary to eat, he prepared for the night.

He put a large rock in the trail, poised precariously, which anyone climbing the path in the dark would be sure to dislodge. The noise would awaken him. He stretched himself on the pile of skins, painfully aware of the stress and strain of his long trek, which had taxed even his iron frame to the utmost. He was asleep almost the instant he touched his rude bed.

It was because of this weariness of body and mind that he did not hear the velvet-footed approach of the thing that crept upon him in the darkness. He woke only when taloned fingers clenched murderously on his throat and an inhuman voice whinnied sickening triumph in his ear.

Gordon's reflexes had been trained in a thousand battles. So now he was fighting for his life before he was awake enough to know whether it was an ape or a great serpent that had attacked him. The fierce fingers had almost crushed his throat before he had a chance to tense his neck muscles. Yet those powerful muscles, even though relaxed, had saved his life. Even so the attack was so stunning, the grasp so nearly fatal, that as they rolled over the floor Gordon

wasted precious seconds trying to tear away the strangling hands by wrenching at the wrists. Then as his fighting brain asserted itself, even through the red, thickening mists that were enfolding him, he shifted his tactics, drove a savage knee into a hard-muscled belly, and getting his thumbs under the little finger of each crushing hand, bent them fiercely back. No strength can resist that leverage. The unknown attacker let go, and instantly Gordon smashed a trip-hammer blow against the side of his head and rolled clear as the hard frame went momentarily limp. It was as dark in the cave as the gullet of Hell, so dark Gordon could not even see his antagonist.

He sprang to his feet, drawing his scimitar. He stood poised, tense, wondering uncomfortably if the thing could see in the dark, and scarcely breathing as he strained his ears. At the first faint sound he sprang like a panther, and slashed murderously at the noise. The blade cut only empty air, there was an incoherent cry, a shuffle of feet, then the rapidly receding pad of hurried footsteps. Whatever it was, it was in retreat. Gordon tried to follow it, ran into a blank wall, and by the time he had located the side door through which, apparently, the creature had fled, the sounds had faded out. The American struck a match and glared around, not expecting to see anything that would give him a clue to the mystery. Nor did he. The rock floor of the cavern showed no footprint.

What manner of creature he had fought in the dark he did not know. Its body had not seemed hairy enough for an ape, though the head had been a tangled mass of hair. Yet it had not fought like a human being; he had felt its talons and teeth, and it was hard to believe that human muscles could have contained such iron strength as he had encountered. And the noises it had made had certainly not resembled the sounds a man makes, even in combat.

Gordon picked up his rifle and went out on the ledge. From the position of the stars, it was past midnight. He sat down on the ledge, with his back against the cliff wall. He did not intend to sleep, but he slept in spite of himself, and woke suddenly, to find himself on his feet, with every nerve tingling, and his skin crawling with the sensation that grim peril had crept close upon him.

Even as he wondered if a bad dream had awakened him, he glimpsed a vague shadow fading into the black mouth of a cave not far away. He threw up his rifle and the shot sent the echoes flying and ringing from cliff to cliff. He waited tensely, but neither saw nor heard anything else.

After that he sat with his rifle across his knees, every faculty alert. His position, he realized, was precarious. He was like a man marooned on a deserted island. It was a day's hard ride to the caravan road to the south. On foot it would take longer. He could reach it, unhindered—but unless Hawkston had abandoned the quest, which was not likely, the Englishman's caravan was moving along that road somewhere. If Gordon met it, alone and on foot—Gordon had no illusions about Hawkston. But there was still a greater danger:

Shalan ibn Mansour. He did not know why the shaykh had not tracked him down already, but it was certain that Shalan, scouring the desert to find the man who slew his warriors at the Well of Amir Khan, would eventually run him down. When that happened, Gordon did not wish to be caught out on the desert, on foot. Here, in the caves, with water, food and shelter, he would have at least a fighting chance. If Hawkston and Shalan should chance to arrive at the same time—that offered possibilities. Gordon was a fighting man who depended on his wits as much as his sword, and he had set his enemies tearing at each other before now. But there was a present menace to him, in the caves themselves, a menace he felt was the solution to the riddle of Al Wazir's fate. That menace he meant to drive to bay with the coming of daylight.

He sat there until dawn turned the eastern sky rose and white. With the coming of the light he strained his eyes into the desert, expecting to see a moving line of dots that would mean men on camels. But only the tawny, empty waste levels and ridges met his gaze. Not until the sun was rising did he enter the caves; the level beams struck into them, disclosing features that had been veiled in shadows the evening before.

He went first to the passage where he had first heard the sinister footfalls, and there he found the explanation to one mystery. A series of hand and foot holds, lightly nitched in the stone of the wall, led up through a square hole in the rocky ceiling into the cave above. The djinn of the caves had been in that passage, and had escaped by that route, for some reason choosing flight rather than battle just then.

Now that he was rested, he became aware of the bite of hunger, and headed for The Eagle's Nest, to get his breakfast out of the tins before he pursued his exploration of the caves. He entered the wide chamber, lighted by the early sun which streamed through the door—and stopped dead.

A bent figure in the door of the storeroom wheeled erect, to face him. For an instant they both stood frozen. Gordon saw a man confronting him like an image of the primordial—naked, gaunt, with a great matted tangle of hair and beard, from which the eyes blazed weirdly. It might have been a caveman out of the dawn centuries who stood there, a stone gripped in each brawny hand. But the high, broad forehead, half hidden under the thatch of hair, was not the slanting brow of a savage. Nor was the face, almost covered though it was by the tangled beard.

"Ivan!" ejaculated Gordon aghast, and the explanation of the mystery rushed upon him, with all its sickening implications. Al Wazir was a madman.

As if goaded by the sound of his voice, the naked man started violently, cried out incoherently, and hurled the rock in his right hand. Gordon dodged and it shattered on the wall behind him with an impact that warned him of the unnatural power lurking in the maniac's thews. Al Wazir was taller than Gordon, with a magnificent, broad-shouldered, lean-hipped torso, ridged with muscles.

Gordon half turned and set his rifle against the wall, and as he did so, Al Wazir hurled the rock in his left hand, awkwardly, and followed it across the cave with a bound, shrieking frightfully, foam flying from his lips.

Gordon met him breast to breast, bracing his muscular legs against the impact, and Al Wazir grunted explosively as he was stopped dead in his tracks. Gordon pinioned his arms at his side, and a wild shriek broke from the madman's lips as he tore and plunged like a trapped animal. His muscles were like quivering steel wires under Gordon's grasp, that writhed and knotted. His teeth snapped beast-like at Gordon's throat, and as the American jerked back his head to escape them, Al Wazir tore loose his right arm, and whipped it over Gordon's left arm and down. Before the American could prevent it, he had grasped the scimitar hilt and torn the blade from its scabbard. Up and back went the long arm, with the sheen of naked steel, and Gordon, sensing death in the lifted sword, smashed his left fist to the madman's jaw. It was a short terrific hook that traveled little more than a foot, but it was like the jolt of a mule's kick.

Al Wazir's head snapped back between his shoulders under the impact, then fell limply forward on his breast. His legs gave way simultaneously and Gordon caught him and eased him to the rocky floor.

Leaving the limp form where it lay, Gordon went hurriedly into the storeroom and secured the rope. Returning to the senseless man he knotted it about his waist, then lifted him to a sitting position against a natural stone pillar at the back of the cave, passed the rope about the column and tied it with an intricate knot on the other side. The rope was too strong, even for the superhuman strength of a maniac, and Al Wazir could not reach backward around the pillar to reach and untie the knot. Then Gordon set to work reviving the man—no light task, for El Borak, with the peril of death upon him, had struck hard, with the drive and snap of steel-trap muscles. Only the heavy beard had saved the jawbone from fracture.

But presently the eyes opened and gazed wildly around, flaring redly as they fixed on Gordon's face. The clawing hands with their long black nails, came up and caught at Gordon's throat, as the American drew back out of reach. Al Wazir made a convulsive effort to rise, then sank back and crouched, with his unwinking stare, his fingers making aimless motions. Gordon looked at him somberly, sick at his soul. What a miserable, revolting end to dreams and philosophies! Al Wazir had come into the desert seeking meditation and peace and the visions of the ancient prophets; he had found horror and insanity. Gordon had come looking for a hermit-philosopher, radiant with mellow wisdom; he had found a filthy, naked madman.

The American filled an empty tin with water and set it, with an opened tin of meat, near Al Wazir's hand. An instant later he dodged, as the mad hermit hurled the tins at him with all his power. Shaking his head in despair, Gordon

went into the store-room and broke his own fast. He had little heart to eat, with the ruin of that once-splendid personality before him, but the urgings of hunger would not be denied.

It was while thus employed that a sudden noise outside brought him to his feet, galvanized by the imminence of danger.

CHAPTER V.

Hawks at Bay

It was the rattling fall of the stone Gordon had placed in the path that had alarmed him. Someone was climbing up the winding trail! Snatching up his rifle he glided out on the ledge. One of his enemies had come at last.

Down at the pool a weary, dusty camel was drinking. On the path, a few feet below the ledge there stood a tall, wiry man in dust-stained boots and breeches, his torn shirt revealing his brown, muscular chest.

"Gordon!" this man ejaculated, staring amazedly into the black muzzle of the American's rifle. "How the devil did you get here?" His hands were empty, resting on an outcropping of rock, just as he had halted in the act of climbing. His rifle was slung to his back, pistol and scimitar in their scabbards at his belt.

"Put up your hands, Hawkston," ordered Gordon, and the Englishman obeyed.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated. "I left you in el-Azem—"

"Salim lived long enough to tell me what he saw in the hut by Mekmet's Pool. I came by a road you know nothing about. Where are the other jackals?"

Hawkston shook the sweat-beads from his sun-burnt forehead. He was above medium height, brown, hard as sole-leather, with a dark hawk-like face and a high-bridged predatory nose arching over a thin black mustache. A lawless adventurer, his scintillant grey eyes reflected a ruthless and reckless nature, and as a fighting man he was as notorious as was Gordon—more notorious in Arabia, for Afghanistan had been the stage for most of El Borak's exploits.

"My men? Dead by now, I fancy. The Ruweila are on the war-path. Shalan ibn Mansour caught us at Sulaymen's Well, with fifty men. We made a barricade of our saddles among the palms and stood them off all day. Van Brock and three of our camel-drivers were killed during the fighting, and Krakovitch was wounded. That night I took a camel and cleared out. I knew it was no use hanging on."

"You swine," said Gordon without passion. He did not call Hawkston a coward. He knew that not cowardice, but a cynical determination to save his skin at all hazards had driven the Englishman to desert his wounded and beleaguered companions.

"There wasn't any use for us all to be killed," retorted Hawkston. "I believed one man could sneak away in the dark and I did. They rushed the camp just as I got clear. I heard them killing the others. Ortelli howled like a lost soul when they cut his throat—I knew they'd run me down long before I could reach the Coast, so I headed for the caves—northwest across the open desert, leaving the

road and Khosru's Well off to the south. It was a long, dry ride, and I made it more by luck than anything else. And now can I put my hands down?"

"You might as well," replied Gordon, the rifle at his shoulder never wavering. "In a few seconds it won't matter much to you where your hands are."

Hawkston's expression did not change. He lowered his hands, but kept them away from his belt.

"You mean to kill me?" he asked calmly.

"You murdered my friend Salim. You came here to torture and rob Al Wazir. You'd kill me if you got the chance. I'd be a fool to let you live."

"Are you going to shoot me in cold blood?"

"No. Climb up on the ledge. I'll give you any kind of an even break you want."

Hawkston complied, and a few seconds later stood facing the American. An observer would have been struck by a certain similarity between the two men. There was no facial resemblance, but both were burned dark by the sun, both were built with the hard economy of rawhide and spring steel, and both wore the keen, hawk-like aspect which is the common brand of men who live by their wits and guts out on the raw edges of the world.

Hawkston stood with his empty hands at his sides while Gordon faced him with rifle held hip-low, but covering his midriff.

"Rifles, pistols or swords?" asked the American. "They say you can handle a blade."

"Second to none in Arabia," answered Hawkston confidently. "But I'm not going to fight you, Gordon."

"You will!" A red flame began to smolder in the black eyes. "I know you, Hawkston. You've got a slick tongue, and you're treacherous as a snake. We'll settle this thing here and now. Choose your weapons—or by God, I'll shoot you down in your tracks!"

Hawkston shook his head calmly.

"You wouldn't shoot a man in cold blood, Gordon. I'm not going to fight you—yet. Listen, man, we'll have plenty of fighting on our hands before long! Where's Al Wazir?"

"That's none of your business," growled Gordon.

"Well, no matter. You know why I'm here. And I know you came here to stop me if you could. But just now you and I are in the same boat. Shalan ibn Mansour's on my trail. I slipped through his fingers, as I said, but he picked up my tracks and was after me within a matter of hours. His camels were faster and fresher than mine, and he's been slowly overhauling me. When I topped the tallest of those ridges to the south there, I saw his dust. He'll be here within the next hour! He hates you as much as he does me.

"You need my help, and I need yours. With Al Wazir to help us, we can hold these caves indefinitely."

Gordon frowned. Hawkston's tale sounded plausible, and would explain why Shalan ibn Mansour had not come hot on the American's trail, and why the

Englishman had not arrived at the caves sooner. But Hawkston was such a snake-tongued liar it was dangerous to trust him. The merciless creed of the desert said shoot him down without any more parley, and take his camel. Rested, it would carry Gordon and Al Wazir out of the desert. But Hawkston had gauged Gordon's character correctly when he said the American could not shoot a man in cold blood.

"Don't move," Gordon warned him, and holding the cocked rifle like a pistol in one hand, he disarmed Hawkston, and ran a hand over him to see that he had no concealed weapons. If his scruples prevented him shooting his enemy, he was determined not to give that enemy a chance to get the drop on him. For he knew Hawkston had no such scruples.

"How do I know you're not lying?" he demanded.

"Would I have come here alone, on a worn-out camel, if I wasn't telling the truth?" countered Hawkston. "We'd better hide that camel, if we can. If we should beat them off, we'll need it to get to the Coast on. Damn it, Gordon, your suspicion and hesitation will get our throats cut yet! Where's Al Wazir?"

"Turn and look into that cave," replied Gordon grimly.

Hawkston, his face suddenly sharp with suspicion, obeyed. As his eyes rested on the figure crouched against the column at the back of the cavern, his breath sucked in sharply.

"Al Wazir! What in God's name's the matter with him?"

"Too much loneliness, I reckon," growled Gordon. "He's stark mad. He couldn't tell you where to find the Blood of the Gods if you tortured him all day."

"Well, it doesn't matter much just now," muttered Hawkston callously. "Can't think of treasure when life itself is at stake. Gordon, you'd better believe me! We should be preparing for a siege, not standing here chinning. If Shalan ibn Mansour—look!" He started violently, his long arm stabbing toward the south.

Gordon did not turn at the exclamation. He stepped back instead, out of the Englishman's reach, and still covering the man, shifted his position so he could watch both Hawkston and the point of the compass indicated. Southeastward the country was undulating, broken by barren ridges. Over the farthest ridge a string of white dots was pouring, and a faint dust-haze billowed up in the air. Men on camels! A regular horde of them.

"The Ruweila!" exclaimed Hawkston. "They'll be here within the hour!"

"They may be men of yours," answered Gordon, too wary to accept anything not fully proven. Hawkston was as tricky as a fox, and to make a mistake on the desert meant death. "We'll hide that camel, though, just on the chance you're telling the truth. Go ahead of me down the trail."

Paying no attention to the Englishman's profanity, Gordon herded him down the path to the pool. Hawkston took the camel's rope and went ahead leading it, under Gordon's guidance. A few hundred yards north of the pool

there was a narrow canyon winding deep into a break of the hills, and a short distance up this ravine Gordon showed Hawkston a narrow cleft in the wall, concealed behind a jutting boulder. Through this the camel was squeezed, into a natural pocket, open at the top, roughly round in shape, and about forty feet across.

"I don't know whether the Arabs know about this place or not," said Gordon. "But we'll have to take the chance that they won't find the beast."

Hawkston was nervous.

"For God's sake let's get back to the caves! They're coming like the wind. If they catch us in the open they'll shoot us like rabbits!"

He started back at a run, and Gordon was close on his heels. But Hawkston's nervousness was justified. The white men had not quite reached the foot of the trail that led up to the caves when a low thunder of hoofs rose on their ears, and over the nearest ridge came a wild white-clad figure on a camel, waving a rifle. At the sight of them he yelled stridently and flogged his beast into a more furious gallop, and threw his rifle to his shoulder. Behind him man after man topped the ridge—Bedouins on hejin—white racing camels.

"Up the cliff, man!" yelled Hawkston, pale under his bronze. Gordon was already racing up the path, and behind him Hawkston panted and cursed, urging greater haste, where more speed was impossible. Bullets began to snick against the cliff, and the foremost rider howled in blood-thirsty glee as he bore down swiftly upon them. He was many yards ahead of his companions, and he was a remarkable marksman, for an Arab. Firing from the rocking, swaying saddle, he was clipping his targets close.

Hawkston yelped as he was stung by a flying sliver of rock, flaked off by a smashing slug.

"Damn you, Gordon!" he panted. "This is your fault—your bloody stubbornness—he'll pick us off like rabbits—"

The oncoming rider was not more than three hundred yards from the foot of the cliff, and the rim of the ledge was ten feet above the climbers. Gordon wheeled suddenly, threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired all in one motion, so quickly he did not even seem to take aim. But the Arab went out of his saddle like a man hit by lightning. Without pausing to note the result of his shot, Gordon raced on up the path, and an instant later he swarmed over the ledge, with Hawkston at his heels.

"Damndest snap-shot I ever saw!" gasped the Englishman.

"There's your guns," grunted Gordon, throwing himself flat on the ledge. "Here they come!"

Hawkston snatched his weapons from the rock where Gordon had left them, and followed the American's example.

The Arabs had not paused. They greeted the fall of their reckless leader with yells of hate, but they flogged their mounts and came on in a headlong rush.

They meant to spring off at the foot of the trail and charge up it on foot. There were at least fifty, of them.

The two men lying prone on the ledge above did not lose their heads. Veterans, both of them, of a thousand wild battles, they waited coolly until the first of the riders were within good range. Then they began firing, without haste and without error. And at each shot a man tumbled headlong from his saddle or slumped forward on his mount's bobbing neck.

Not even Bedouins could charge into such a blast of destruction. The rush wavered, split, turned on itself—and in an instant the white-clad riders were turning their backs on the caves and flogging in the other direction as madly as they had come. Five of them would never charge again, and as they fled Hawkston drilled one of the rearmost men neatly between the shoulders.

They fell back beyond the first low, stone-littered ridge, and Hawkston shook his rifle at them and cursed them with virile eloquence.

"Desert scum! Try it again, you bounders!"

Gordon wasted no breath on words. Hawkston had told the truth, and Gordon knew he was in no danger from treachery from that source, for the present. Hawkston would not attack him as long as they were confronted by a common enemy—but he knew that the instant that peril was removed, the Englishman might shoot him in the back, if he could.

Their position was bad, but it might well have been worse. The Bedouins were all seasoned desert-fighters, cruel as wolves. Their chief had a blood-feud with both white men, and would not fail to grasp the chance that had thrown them into his reach. But the defenders had the advantage of shelter, an inexhaustible water supply, and food enough to last for months. Their only weakness was the limited amount of ammunition.

Without consulting one another, they took their stations on the ledge, Hawkston to the north of the trailhead, Gordon about an equal distance to the south of it.

There was no need for a conference; each man knew the other knew his business. They lay prone, gathering broken rocks in heaps before them to add to the protection offered by the ledge-rim.

Spurts of flame began to crown the ridge; bullets whined and splatted against the rock. Men crept from each end of the ridge into the clusters of boulders that littered the plain. The men on the ledge held their fire, unmoved by the slugs that whistled and spanged near at hand. Their minds worked so similarly in a situation like this that they understood each other without the necessity of conversation. There was no chance of them wasting two cartridges on the same man. An imaginary line, running from the foot of the trail to the ridge, divided their territories. When a turbaned head was poked from a rock north of that line, it was Hawkston's rifle that knocked the man dead and sprawling over the boulder. And when a Bedouin darted from behind a spur of

rock south of that line in a weaving, dodging run for cover nearer the cliff, Hawkston held his fire. Gordon's rifle cracked and the runner took the earth in a rolling tumble that ended in a brief thrashing of limbs.

A voice rose from the ridge, edged with fury.

"That's Shalan, damn him!" snarled Hawkston. "Can you make out what he says?"

"He's telling his men to keep out of sight," answered Gordon. "He tells them to be patient—they've got plenty of time."

"And that's the truth, too," grunted Hawkston. "They've got time, food, water—they'll be sneaking to the pool after dark to fill their water-skins. I wish one of us could get a clean shot at Shalan. But he's too foxy to give us a chance at him. I saw him when they were charging us, standing back on the ridge, too far away to risk a bullet on him."

"If we could drop him the rest of them wouldn't hang around here a minute," commented Gordon. "They're afraid of the man-eating djinn they think haunts these hills."

"Well, if they could get a good look at Al Wazir now, they'd swear it was the djinn in person," said Hawkston. "How many cartridges have you?"

"Both guns are full, about a dozen extra rifle cartridges."

Hawkston swore.

"I haven't many more than that, myself. We'd better toss a coin to see which one of us sneaks out tonight, while the other keeps up a fusilade to distract their attention. The one who stays gets both rifles and all the ammunition."

"We will like hell," growled Gordon. "If we can't all go, Al Wazir with us, nobody goes!"

"You're crazy to think of a lunatic at a time like this!"

"Maybe. But if you try to sneak off I'll drill you in the back as you run."

Hawkston snarled wordlessly and fell silent. Both men lay motionless as red Indians, watching the ridge and the rocks that shimmered in the heat waves. The firing had ceased, but they had glimpses of white garments from time to time among the gullies and stones, as the besiegers crept about among the boulders. Some distance to the south Gordon saw a group creeping along a shallow gully that ran to the foot of the cliff. He did not waste lead on them. When they reached the cliff at that point they would be no better off. They were too far away for effective shooting, and the cliff could be climbed only at the point where the trail wound upward. Gordon fell to studying the hill that was serving the white men as their fortress.

Some thirty caves formed the lower tier, extending across the curtain of rock that formed the face of the cliff. As he knew, each cave was connected by a narrow passage to the adjoining chamber. There were three tiers above this one, all the tiers connected by ladders of hand-holds nitched in the rock, mounting from the lower caves through holes in the stone ceiling to the ones above. The Eagle's Nest, in which Al Wazir was tied, safe from flying lead,

was approximately in the middle of the lower tier, and the path hewn in the rock came upon the ledge directly before its opening. Hawkston was lying in front of the third cave to the north of it, and Gordon lay before the third cave to the south.

The Arabs lay in a wide semi-circle, extending from the rocks at one end of the low ridge, along its crest, and into the rocks at the other end. Only those lying among the rocks were close enough to do any damage, save by accident. And looking up at the ledge from below, they could see only the gleaming muzzles of the white men's rifles, or catch fleeting glimpses of their heads occasionally. They seemed to be weary of wasting lead on such difficult targets. Not a shot had been fired for some time.

Gordon found himself wondering if a man on the crest of the cliff above the caves could, looking down, see him and Hawkston lying on the ledge. He studied the wall above him; it was almost sheer, but other, narrower ledges ran along each tier of caves, obstructing the view from above, as it did from the lower ledge. Remembering the craggy sides of the hill, Gordon did not believe these plains-dwellers would be able to scale it at any point.

He was just contemplating returning to The Eagle's Nest to offer food and water again to Al Wazir, when a faint sound reached his ears that caused him to go tense with suspicion.

It seemed to come from the caves behind him. He glanced at Hawkston. The Englishman was squinting along his rifle barrel, trying to get a bead on a kafieh that kept bobbing in and out among the boulders near the end of the ridge.

Gordon wriggled back from the ledge-rim and rolled into the mouth of the nearest cave before he stood up, out of sight of the men below. He stood still, straining his ears.

There it was again—soft and furtive, like the rustle of cloth against stone, the shuffle of bare feet. It came from some point south of where he stood. Gordon moved silently in that direction, passed through the adjoining chamber, entered the next—and came face to face with a tall, bearded Bedouin who yelled and whirled up a scimitar. Another raider, a man with an evil, scarred face, was directly behind him, and three more were crawling out of a cleft in the floor.

Gordon fired from the hip, checking the downward stroke of the scimitar. The scar-faced Arab fired over the falling body and Gordon felt a numbing shock run up his arms, jerked the trigger and got no response. The bullet had smashed into the lock, ruining the mechanism. He heard Hawkston yell savagely, out on the ledge, heard the pumping fusilade of the Englishman's rifle, and a storm of shots and yells rising from the valley. They were storming the cliff! And Hawkston must meet them alone, for Gordon had his hands full.

What takes long to relate, actually happened in split seconds. Before the scarred Bedouin could fire again Gordon knocked him sprawling with a kick

in the groin, and reversing his rifle, crushed the skull of a man who lunged at him with a long knife. No time to draw pistol or scimitar. It was hand-to-hand slaughter with a vengeance in the narrow cave, two Bedouins tearing at him like wolves, and others jamming the shaft in their eagerness to join the fray.

No quarter given or expected—a whirlwind of furious motion, blades flashing and whickering, clanging on the rifle barrel and biting into the stock as Gordon parried—and the butt crushing home and men going down with their heads smashed. The scarred nomad had risen, but fearing to fire because of the desperate closeness of the melee, rushed in, clubbing his rifle, just as the last man dropped. Gordon, bleeding from a gash across the breast muscles, ducked the swinging stock, shifted his grip on his own rifle and drove the blood-smeared butt, like a dagger, full in the bearded face. Teeth and bones crumpled and the man toppled backward into the shaft, carrying with him the men who were just clambering out.

Snatching the instant's respite Gordon sprang to the mouth of the shaft, whipping out his automatic. Wild bearded faces crowding the shaft glared up at him, frozen with the recognition of doom—then the cave reverberated deafeningly to the thundering of the big automatic, blasting those wild faces into red ruin. It was slaughter at that range, blood and brains spattered, nerveless hands released their holds, bodies went sliding down the shaft in a red welter, jamming and choking it.

Gordon glared down it for an instant, all killer in that moment, then whirled and ran out on the ledge. Bullets sang past his head, and he saw Hawkston stuffing fresh cartridges into his rifle. No living Arab was in sight, but half a dozen new forms between the ridge and the foot of the trail told of a determined effort to storm the cliff, defeated only by the Englishman's deadly accuracy.

Hawkston shouted: "What the hell's been going on in there?"

"They've found a shaft leading up from somewhere down below," snapped Gordon. "Watch for another rush while I try to jam it."

Ignoring lead slapped at him from among the rocks, he found a sizable boulder and rolled it into the cave. He peered cautiously down the well. Hand and foot holds nitched in the rock formed precarious stair-steps in the slanting side. Some forty feet down the shaft made an angle, and it was there the bodies of the Arabs had jammed. But now only one corpse hung there, and as he looked it moved, as if imbued with life, and slid down out of sight. Men below the angle were pulling the bodies out, to clear the way for a fresh attack.

Gordon rolled the boulder into the shaft and it rumbled downward and wedged hard at the angle. He did not believe it could be dislodged from below, and his belief was confirmed by a muffled chorus of maledictions swelling up from the depths.

Gordon was sure this shaft had not been in existence when he first came to

the caves with Al Wazir, a year before. Exploring the caverns in search of the madman, the night before, it was not strange that he had failed to notice the narrow mouth in a dark corner of the cave. That it opened into some cleft at the foot of the cliff was obvious. He remembered the men he had seen stealing along the gully to the south. They had found that lower cleft, and the simultaneous attack from both sides had been well planned. But for Gordon's keen ears it might have succeeded. As it was it had left the American with an empty pistol and a broken rifle.

Gordon dragged the bodies of the four Arabs he had killed to the ledge and heaved them over, ignoring the ferocious yells and shots that emanated from the rocks. He did not bother to marvel that he had emerged the victor from that desperate melee. He knew that fighting was half speed and strength and wit, and half blind luck. His number was not up yet, that was all.

Then he set out on a thorough tour of investigation through the lower tiers, in search of other possible shafts. Passing through The Eagle's Nest, he glanced at Al Wazir, sitting against the pillar. The man seemed to be asleep; his hairy head was sunk on his breast, his hands folded limply over the rope about his waist. Gordon set food and water beside him.

His explorations revealed no more unexpected tunnels. Gordon returned to the ledge with tins of food and a skin of water, procured from the stream which had its source in one of the caves. They ate lying flat on the shelf, for keen eyes were watching with murderous hate and eager trigger-finger from ridge and rock. The sun had passed its zenith.

Their frugal meal finished, the white men lay baking in the heat like lizards on a rock, watching the ridge. The afternoon waned.

"You've got another rifle," said Hawkston.

"Mine was broken in the fight in the cave. I took this one from one of the men I killed. It has a full magazine, but no more cartridges for it. My pistol's empty."

"I've got only the cartridges in my guns," muttered Hawkston. "Looks like our number's up. They're just waiting for dark before they rush us again. One of us might get away in the dark, while the other held the fort, but since you won't agree to that, there's nothing to do but sit here and wait until they cut our throats."

"We have one chance," said Gordon. "If we can kill Shalan, the others will run. He's not afraid of man or devil, but his men fear djinn. They'll be nervous as the devil after night falls."

Hawkston laughed harshly. "Fool's talk. Shalan won't give us a chance at him. We'll all die here. All but Al Wazir. The Arabs won't harm him. But they won't help him, either. Damn him! Why did he have to go mad?"

"It wasn't very considerate," Gordon agreed with biting irony. "But then, you see he didn't know you wanted to torture him into telling where he hid the Blood of the Gods."

"It wouldn't have been the first time a man has been tortured for them," retorted Hawkston. "Man, you have no real idea of the value of those jewels. I saw them once, when Al Wazir was governor of Oman. The sight of them's enough to drive a man mad. Their story sounds like a tale out of The Arabian Nights. Only God knows how many women have given up their souls or men their lives because of them, since Ala eddin Muhammad of Delhi plundered the Hindu temple of Somnath, and found them among the loot. That was in 1294. They've blazed a crimson path across Asia since then. Blood's spilt wherever they go. I'd poison my own brother to get them—" The wild flame that rose in the Englishman's eyes made it easy for Gordon to believe it, and he was swept by a revulsion toward the man.

"I'm going to feed Al Wazir," he said abruptly, rising.

No shots had come from the rocks for some time, though they knew their foes were there, waiting with their ancient, terrible patience. The sun had sunk behind the hills, the ravines and ridges were veiled in great blue shadows. Away to the east a silver-bright star winked out and quivered in the deepening blue.

Gordon strode into the square chamber—and was galvanized at the sight of the stone pillar standing empty. With a stride he reached it; bent over the frayed ends of the severed rope that told their own story. Al Wazir had found a way to free himself. Slowly, painfully, working with his claw-like fingernails through the long day, the madman had picked apart the tough strands of the heavy rope. And he was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

The Devil of the Night

Gordon stepped to the door of the Nest and said curtly: "Al Wazir's gotten away. I'm going to search the caves for him. Stay on the ledge and keep watch."

"Why waste the last minutes of your life chasing a lunatic through a rat-run?" growled Hawkston. "It'll be dark soon and the Arabs will be rushing us—"

"You wouldn't understand," snarled Gordon, turning away.

The task ahead of him was distasteful. Searching for a homicidal maniac through the darkening caves was bad enough, but the thought of having forcibly to subdue his friend again was revolting. But it must be done. Left to run at large in the caves Al Wazir might do harm either to himself or to them. A stray bullet might strike him down.

A swift search through the lower tier proved fruitless, and Gordon mounted by the ladder into the second tier. As he climbed through the hole into the cave above he had an uncomfortable feeling that Al Wazir was crouching at the rim to break his head with a rock. But only silence and emptiness greeted him. Dusk was filling the caves so swiftly he began to despair of finding the madman. There were a hundred nooks and corners where Al Wazir could crouch unobserved, and Gordon's time was short.

The ladder that connected the second tier with the third was in the chamber into which he had come, and glanc-

ing up through it Gordon was startled to see a circle of deepening blue set with a winking star. In an instant he was climbing toward it.

He had discovered another unsuspected exit from the caves. The ladder of hand holds led through the ceiling, up the wall of the cave above, and up through a round shaft that opened in the ceiling of the highest cave. He went up, like a man climbing up a chimney, and a few moments later thrust his head over the rim.

He had come out on the summit of the cliffs. To the east the rock rim pitched up sharply, obstructing his view, but to the west he looked out over a jagged backbone that broke in gaunt crags outlined against the twilight. He stiffened as somewhere a pebble rattled down, as if dislodged by a groping foot. Had Al Wazir come this way? Was the madman somewhere out there, climbing among those shadowy crags? If he was, he was courting death by the slip of a hand or a foot.

As he strained his eyes in the deepening shadows, a call welled up from below: "I say, Gordon! The blighters are getting ready to rush us! I see them massing among the rocks!"

With a curse Gordon started back down the shaft. It was all he could do. With darkness gathering Hawkston would not be able to hold the ledge alone.

Gordon went down swiftly, but before he reached the ledge darkness had fallen, lighted but little by the stars. The Englishman crouched on the rim, staring down into the dim gulf of shadows below.

"They're coming!" he muttered, cocking his rifle. "Listen!"

There was no shooting, this time—only the swift purposeful slap of sandalled feet over the stones. In the faint starlight a shadowy mass detached itself from the outer darkness and rolled toward the foot of the cliff. Steel clinked on the rocks. The mass divided into individual figures. Men grew up out of the darkness below. No use to waste bullets on shadows. The white men held their fire. The Arabs were on the trail, and they came up with a rush, steel gleaming dully in their hands. The path was thronged with dim figures; the defenders caught the glitter of white eyeballs, rolling upward.

They began to work their rifles. The dark was cut with incessant spurts of flame. Lead thudded home. Men cried out. Bodies rolled from the trail, to strike sickeningly on the rocks below. Somewhere back in the darkness, Shalan ibn Mansour's voice was urging on his slayers. The crafty shaykh had no intentions of risking his hide within reach of those grim fighters holding the ledge.

Hawkston cursed him as he worked his rifle.

"Thibhahum, bism er rassul!" sobbed the bloodlusting howl as the maddened Bedouins fought their way upward, frothing like rabid dogs in their hate and eagerness to tear the Infidels limb from limb.

Gordon's hammer fell with an empty click. He clubbed the rifle and stepped

to the head of the path. A white-clad form loomed before him, fighting for a foothold on the ledge. The swinging rifle-butt crushed his head like an egg-shell. A rifle fired point-blank singed Gordon's brows and his gun-stock shattered the rifleman's shoulder.

Hawkston fired his last cartridge, hurled the empty rifle and leaped to Gordon's side, scimitar in hand. He cut down a Bedouin who was scrambling over the rim with a knife in his teeth. The Arabs massed in a milling clump below the rim, snarling like wolves, flinching from the blows that rained down from rifle butt and scimitar.

Men began to slink back down the trail.

"Wallah!" wailed a man. "They are devils! Flee, brothers!"

"Dogs!" yelled Shalan ibn Mansour, an eery voice out of the darkness. He stood on a low knoll near the ridge, but he was invisible to the men on the cliff, part of the thick shadows. "Stand to it! There are but two of them!"

"They have ceased firing, so their guns must be empty! If you do not bring me their heads I will flay you alive! Theyahhh! Ya allah—!" His voice rose to an incoherent scream, and then broke in a horrible gurgle. That was followed by a tense silence, in which the Arabs clinging to the trail and massed at its foot twisted their heads over their shoulders to glare in amazement in the direction whence the cry had come. The men on the ledge, glad of the respite, shook the sweat from their eyes and stood listening with equal surprise and interest.

Someone called: "Ohai, Shalan ibn Mansour! Is all well with thee?"

There was no reply, and one of the Arabs left the foot of the cliff and ran toward the knoll, shouting the shaykh's name. The men on the ledge could trace his progress by his strident voice.

"Why did the shaykh cry out and fall silent?" shouted a man on the path. "What has happened, Haditha?"

Haditha's reply came back plainly.

"I have reached the knoll whereon he stood—I do not see him— Wallah! He is dead! He lies here slain, with his throat torn out! Allah! Help!" He screamed, fired, and then came sounds of his frantic flight. And as he howled like a lost soul, for the flash of the shot had showed him a face stooping above the dead man, a wild grinning visage rendered inhuman by a matted tangle of hair—the face of a devil to the terrified Arab. And above his shrieks, as he ran, rose burst upon burst of maniacal laughter.

"Flee! Flee! I have seen it! It is the djinn of El Khour!"

Instant panic ensued. Men fell off the trail like ripe apples off a limb screaming: "The djinn has slain Shalan ibn Mansour! Flee, brothers, flee!" The night was filled with their clamor as they stampeded for the ridge, and presently the sounds of lusty whacking and the grunting of camels came back to the men on the ledge. There was no trick about this. The Ruweila, courageous in the face of human foes, but haunted by superstitious terrors, were in full flight, leaving behind them the bodies of their chief and their slain comrades.

"What the devil?" marveled Hawkston.

"It must have been Ivan," muttered Gordon. "Somehow he must have climbed down the crags on the other side of the hill-God, what a climb it must have been!"

They stood there listening, but the only sound that reached their ears was the diminishing noise of the horde's wild flight. Presently they descended the path, past forms grotesquely huddled where they had fallen. More bodies dotted the floor at the foot of the cliff, and Gordon picked up a rifle dropped from a dead hand, and assured himself that it was loaded. With the Arabs in flight, the truce between him and Hawkston might well be at an end. Their future relations would depend entirely upon the Englishman.

A few moments later they stood upon the low knoll on which Shalan ibn Mansour had stood. The Arab chief was still there. He sprawled on his back in a dark crimson puddle, and his throat had been ripped open as if by the claws of a wild beast. He was a grisly sight in the light of the match Gordon shaded over him.

The American straightened, blew out the match and flipped it away. He strained his eyes into the surrounding shadows and called: "Ivan!" There was no answer.

"Do you suppose it was really Al Wazir who killed him?" asked Hawkston uneasily.

"Who else could it have been? He must have sneaked on Shalan from behind. The other fellow caught a glimpse of him, and thought he was the devil of the caves, just as you said they would. " What erratic whim had impelled Al Wazir to this deed, Gordon could not say. Who can guess the vagaries of the insane? The primitive instincts of murder loosed by lunacy—a madman stealing through the night, attracted by a solitary figure shouting from a knoll—it was not so strange, after all.

"Well, let's start looking for him," growled Hawkston. "I know you won't start back to the Coast until we've got him nicely tied up on that bally camel. So the sooner the better."

"All right." Gordon's voice betrayed none of the suspicion in his mind. He knew that Hawkston's nature and purposes had been altered none by what they had passed through. The man was treacherous and unpredictable as a wolf. He turned and started toward the cliff, but he took good care not to let the Englishman get behind him, and he carried his cocked rifle ready.

"I want to find the lower end of that shaft the Arabs came up," said Gordon. "Ivan may be hiding there. It must be near the western end of that gully they were sneaking along when I first saw them."

Not long later they were moving along the shallow gully, and where it ended against the foot of the cliff, they saw a narrow slit-like cleft in the stone, large enough to admit a man. Hoarding their matches carefully they entered and moved along the narrow tunnel into which it opened. This tunnel led straight

back into the cliff for a short distance, then turned sharply to the right, running along until it ended in a small chamber cut out of solid rock, which Gordon believed was directly under the room in which he had fought the Arabs. His belief was confirmed when they found the opening of the shaft leading upward. A match held up in the well showed the angle still blocked by the boulder.

"Well, we know how they got into the caves," growled Hawkston. "But we haven't found Al Wazir. He's not in here."

"We'll go up into the caves," answered Gordon. "He'll come back there for food. We'll catch him then."

"And then what?" demanded Hawkston.

"It's obvious, isn't it? We hit out for the caravan road. Ivan rides. We walk. We can make it, all right. I don't believe the Ruweila will stop before they get back to the tents of their tribe. I'm hoping Ivan's mind can be restored when we get him back to civilization."

"And what about the Blood of the Gods?"

"Well, what about them? They're his, to do what he pleases with them."

Hawkston did not reply, nor did he seem aware of Gordon's suspicion of him. He had no rifle, but Gordon knew the pistol at his hip was loaded. The American carried his rifle in the crook of his arm, and he maneuvered so the Englishman went ahead of him as they groped their way back down the tunnel and out into the starlight. Just what Hawkston's intentions were, he did not know. Sooner or later, he believed, he would have to fight the Englishman for his life. But somehow he felt that this would not be necessary until after Al Wazir had been found and secured.

He wondered about the tunnel and the shaft to the top of the cliff. They had not been there a year ago. Obviously the Arabs had found the tunnel purely by accident.

"No use searching the caves tonight," said Hawkston, when they had reached the ledge. "We'll take turns watching and sleeping. Take the first watch, will you? I didn't sleep last night, you know."

Gordon nodded. Hawkston dragged the sleeping-skins from the Nest and wrapping himself in them, fell asleep close to the wall. Gordon sat down a short distance away, his rifle across his knees. As he sat he dozed lightly, waking each time the sleeping Englishman stirred.

He was still sitting there when the dawn reddened the eastern sky.

Hawkston rose, stretched and yawned.

"Why didn't you wake me to watch my turn?" he asked.

"You know damned well why I didn't," grated Gordon. "I don't care to run the risk of being murdered in my sleep."

"You don't like me, do you, Gordon?" laughed Hawkston. But only his lips smiled, and a red flame smoldered in his eyes. "Well, that makes the feeling mutual, don't you know. After we've gotten Al Wazir back to el-Azem, I'm looking forward to a gentlemanly settling of

our differences—just you and I—and a pair of swords."

"Why wait until then?" Gordon was on his feet, his nostrils quivering with the eagerness of hard-leashed hate.

Hawkston shook his head, smiling fiercely.

"Oh no, El Borak. No fighting until we get out of the desert."

"All right," snarled the American disgruntedly. "Let's eat, and then start combing the caves for Ivan."

A slight sound brought them both wheeling toward the door of the Nest. Al Wazir stood there, plucking at his beard with his long black nails. His eyes lacked their former wild beast glare; they were clouded, plaintive. His attitude was one of bewilderment rather than menace.

"Ivan!" muttered Gordon, setting down his rifle and moving toward the wild man. Al Wazir did not retreat, nor did he make any hostile demonstration. He stood stolidly, uneasily tugging at his tangled beard.

"He's in a milder mood," murmured Gordon. "Easy, Hawkston. Let me handle this. I don't believe he'll have to be overpowered this time."

"In that case," said Hawkston, "I don't need you any longer."

Gordon whipped around; the Englishman's eyes were red with the killing lust, his hand rested on the butt of his pistol. For an instant the two men stood tensely facing one another. Hawkston spoke, almost in a whisper: "You fool, did you think I'd give you an even break? I don't need you to help me get Al Wazir back to el-Azem. I know a German doctor who can restore his mind if anybody can—and then I'll see that he tells me where to find the Blood of the Gods—"

Their right hands moved in a simultaneous blur of speed. Hawkston's gun cleared its holster as Gordon's scimitar flashed free. And the gun spoke just as the blade struck it, knocking it from the Englishman's hand. Gordon felt the wind of the slug and behind him the madman in the door grunted and fell heavily. The pistol rang on the stone and bounced from the ledge, and Gordon cut murderously at Hawkston's head, his eyes red with fury. A swift backward leap carried the Englishman out of range, and Hawkston tore out his scimitar as Gordon came at him in savage silence. The American had seen Al Wazir lying limp in the doorway, blood oozing from his head.

Gordon and Hawkston came together with a dazzling flame and crack of steel, in an unleashing of hard-pent passions, two wild natures a thirst for each others' lives. Here was the urge to kill, loosed at last, and backing every blow.

For a few minutes stroke followed stroke too fast for the eye to distinguish, had any eye witnessed that onslaught. They fought with a chilled-steel fury, a reckless abandon that was yet neither wild or careless. The clang of steel was deafening; miraculously, it seemed, the shimmer of steel played about their heads, yet neither edge cut home. The skill of the two fighters was too well matched.

After the first hurricane of attack, the play changed subtly; it grew, not less savage but more crafty. The desert sun, that had lighted the blades of a thousand generations of swordsmen, in a land sworn to the sword, had never shone on a more scintillating display of swordsmanship than this, where two aliens carved out the destinies of their tangled careers on a high-flung ledge between sun and desert.

Up and down the ledge—scruff and shift of quick-moving feet—gliding, not stamping—ring and clash of steel meeting steel—flame-lighted black eyes glaring into flinty grey eyes; flying blades turned crimson by the rising sun.

Hawkston had cut his teeth on the straight blade of his native land, and he was partial to the point and used it with devilish skill. Gordon had learned sword fighting in the hard school of the Afghan mountain wars, with the curved tulwar, and he fought with no set or orthodox style. His blade was a lethal, living thing that darted like a serpent's tongue or lashed with devastating power.

Here was no ceremonious dueling with elegant rules and formalities. It was a fight for life, naked and desperate, and within the space of half a dozen minutes both men had attempted or foiled tricks that would have made a medieval Italian fencing master blink. There was no pause or breathing spell; only the constant slither and rasp of blade on blade— Hawkston failing in his attempt to maneuver Gordon about so the sun would dazzle his eyes; Gordon almost rushing Hawkston over the rim of the ledge, the Englishman saving himself by a sidewise leap.

The end came suddenly. Hawkston, with sweat pouring down his face, realized that the sheer strength in Gordon's arm was beginning to tell. Even his iron wrist was growing numb under the terrific blows the American rained on his guard. Believing himself to be superior to Gordon in pure fencing skill, he began the preliminaries of an intricate maneuver, and meeting with apparent success, feinted a cut at Gordon's head. El Borak knew it was a feint, but, pretending to be deceived by it, he lifted his sword as though to parry the cut. Instantly Hawkston's point licked at his throat. Even as the Englishman thrust he knew he had been tricked, but he could not check the motion. The blade passed over Gordon's shoulder as the American evaded the thrust with a swaying twist of his torso, and his scimitar flashed like white steel lightning in the sun. Hawkston's dark features were blotted out by a gush of blood and brains; his scimitar rang loud on the rocky ledge; he swayed, tottered, and fell suddenly, his crown split to the hinges of the jawbone.

Gordon shook the sweat from his eyes and glared down at the prostrate figure, too drunken with hate and battle to fully realize that his foe was dead. He started and whirled as a voice spoke weakly behind him: "The same swift blade as ever, El Borak!"

Al Wazir was sitting with his back against the wall. His eyes, no longer murky nor bloodshot, met Gordon's levelly. In spite of his tangled hair and

beard there was something ineffably tranquil and seer-like about him. Here, indeed, was the man Gordon had known of old.

"Ivan! Alive! But Hawkston's bullet..."

"Was that what it was?" Al Wazir lifted a hand to his head; it came away smeared with blood. "Anyway, I'm very much alive, and my mind's clear—for the first time in God knows how long. What happened?"

"You stopped a slug meant for me," grunted Gordon. "Let me see that wound." After a brief investigation he announced: "Just a graze; ploughed through the scalp and knocked you out. I'll wash it and bandage it." While he worked he said tersely: "Hawkston was on your trail; after your rubies. I tried to beat him here, and Shalan ibn Mansour trapped us both. You were a bit out of your head and I had to tie you up. We had a tussle with the Arabs and finally beat them off."

"What day is it?" asked Al Wazir. At Gordon's reply he ejaculated: "Great heavens! It's more than a month since I got knocked on the head!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Gordon. "I thought the loneliness—"

Al Wazir laughed. "Not that, El Borak. I was doing some excavation work—I discovered a shaft in one of the lower caves, leading down to the tunnel. The mouths of both were sealed with slabs of rock. I opened them up, just out of curiosity. Then I found another shaft leading from an upper cave to the summit of the cliff, like a chimney. It was while I was working out the slab that sealed it, that I dislodged a shower of rocks. One of them gave me an awful rap on the head. My mind's been a blank ever since, except for brief intervals—and they weren't very clear. I remember them like bits of dreams, now. I remember squatting in the Nest, tearing tins open and gobbling food, trying to remember who I was and why I was here. Then everything would fade out again.

"I have another vague recollection of being tied to a rock in the cave, and seeing you and Hawkston lying on the ledge, and firing. Of course I didn't know either of you. I remember hearing you saying that if somebody was killed the others would go away. There was a lot of shooting and shouting and that frightened me and hurt my ears. I wanted you all to go away and leave me in peace.

"I don't know how I got loose, but my next disjointed bit of memory is that of creeping up the shaft that leads to the top of the cliff, and then climbing, climbing, with the stars over me and the wind blowing in my face—heavens! I must have climbed over the summit of the hill and down the crags on the other side!

"Then I have a muddled remembrance of running and crawling through the dark—a confused impression of shooting and noise, and a man standing alone on a knoll and shouting—" he shuddered and shook his head. "When I try to remember what happened then, it's all a blind whirl of fire and blood, like a nightmare. Somehow I seemed to feel that the man on the knoll was to blame for all the noise that was maddening me,

and that if he quit shouting, they'd all go away and let me alone. But from that point it's all a blind red mist."

Gordon held his peace. He realized that it was his remark, overheard by Al Wazir, that if Shalan ibn Mansour were slain, the Arabs would flee, which had taken root in the madman's clouded brain and provided the impulse—probably subconsciously—which finally translated itself into action. Al Wazir did not remember having killed the shaykh, and there was no use distressing him with the truth.

"I remember running, then," murmured Al Wazir, rubbing his head. "I was in a terrible fright, and trying to get back to the caves. I remember climbing again—up this time. I must have climbed back over the crags and down the chimney again—I'll wager I couldn't make that climb clothed in my right mind. The next thing I remember is hearing voices, and they sounded somehow familiar. I started toward them—then something cracked and flashed in my head, and I knew nothing more until I came to myself a few moments ago, in possession of all my faculties, and saw you and Hawkston fighting with your swords."

"You were evidently regaining your senses," said Gordon. "It took the extra jolt of that slug to set your numb machinery going again. Such things have happened before.

"Ivan, I've got a camel hidden nearby, and the Arabs left some ropes of hay in their camp when they pulled out. I'm going to feed and water it, and then—well, I intended taking you back to the Coast with me, but since you've regained your wits, I suppose you'll—"

"I'm going back with you," said Al Wazir. "My meditations didn't give me the gift of prophecy, but they convinced me—even before I got that rap on the head—that the best life a man can live is one of service to his fellow man. Just as you do, in your own way! I can't help mankind by dreaming out here in the desert." He glanced down at the prostrate figure on the ledge. "We'll have to build a cairn, first. Poor devil, it was his destiny to be the last sacrifice to the Blood of the Gods."

"What do you mean?"

"They were stained with men's blood," answered Al Wazir. "They have caused nothing but suffering and crime since they first appeared in history. Before I left el-Azem I threw them into the sea."

THE END